Getting Lions from India: More than Bringing Panda from China

**Jamvan, Gini and Jennifer are names of three Indian Lions, who should arrive from Sakkarbaug Zoo, Gujarat, to Prague this summer. Their acquisition was preceded by more than two-year long negotiation, and if everything goes well, it will be the first import of these lions for European Endangered Species Programme (EEP) after more than twenty years.**

Indian Lions, also called Persian Lions, live in the wild only in Gujarat, India, in the Gir National Park and its surroundings. The parents, or rather grandparents of the lions, heading for Prague, originate from there. However, all three of them were born in captivity in Sakkarbaug Zoo in nearby Junagadh in spring 2012.

"For Gujarath lions mean perhaps even more than Giant Pandas for China," Miroslav Bobek, Director of Prague Zoo, says. "Providing them out of India is utterly exceptional and the decision about it was adopted also on the central level. Undoubtedly it is no coincidence, that the Memorandum of Understanding and Strategic Partnership between Prague Zoo and the Government of Gujarat has been signed during a summit, being hold at the turn of the last and this week and attended by the leading heads of states. But this achievement would not be conceivable without the support and cooperation of our ambassador to India, Mr Miloslav Stašek."

The signed agreements between Prague Zoo and successively Indian Central Zoo Authority, Gujarat Government and Sakkarbaug Zoo allow acquisition of the lions, as well as further cooperation on many levels. Upon request of the Indian party, the memorandum with Gujarat Government was signed during the global economic Vibrant Gujarat Summit, attended beside the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi by United States Secretary of State John Kerry, Secretary-General of the United nations Ban Ki-moon, President of the World Bank Jim Young Kim and many prime ministers, ministers and industrialists from all around the world.

According to the Czech Ambassador to India Mr Miloslav Stašek the signature of the memorandums and acquisition of the lions presents a huge success of Prague Zoo.

"Many leading world zoos tried hard to achieve the same, and I am personally very happy, that it is precisely Prague Zoo, who succeeded," Stašek said. "Thanks to many significant activities in nature protection and research of endangered species Prague Zoo has excellent reputation here in India and Indian party is interested in starting a cooperation on expert level. It was prestige and professionalism of biologists and management of Prague Zoo, what played a decisive role in decision-making of Indian Government about donating three specimen of these carnivores to Prague."

The transportation of the lions to Czech Republic is planned for July, when there are the best climatic conditions for it in Gujarat.

"The acquisition of three lions from Gujarat is a key moment for the whole European Endangered Species Programme of this species," Jaroslav Šimek, Deputy Director of Prague Zoo for Zoology, stated. "The European breeding emerged from just nine founders, and it urgently needs reviving by new blood."

Visitors of Prague Zoo will be able to see Jamvar, Gini and Jennifer several weeks after their arrival, after the mandatory post-import quarantine.

Photo 1: Male of Indian Lion, which will arrive to Prague Zoo together with two females, is called Jamvan. Photo: Miroslav Bobek, Prague Zoo

Photo 2: Females of Indian Lion, both of them born in spring 2012, ale called Gini and Jennifer. Photo: Miroslav Bobek, Prague Zoo

Photo 3: Three-member pride of lions should be transported to Czech Republic this July. Photo: Miroslav Bobek, Prague Zoo