Novel plan to promote eco-tourism in Changhang

By Tashi Murup
LEH, March 15: International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) has proposed a novel plan to promote eco-tourism in Changhang which has the Government of India’s advocacy and support.

Identification of Ladakh as one of the eco-tourism circuit by Govt of India was highlighted by the chairman of the National Committee on Eco-Tourism and Mountains held on May 8, 2002 at Hotel Kanithka, New Delhi. Under this Center will assist specific projects requiring involvement of local communities in tourism business while taking care of ecological concern.

And on December 12, 2002, after an intense five-day workshop, Action Plan for Ladakh (LAHDC), all the government departments, NGOs, Tourism, armed Forces and Idu Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) submitted an Action plan.

The Action plan included the one on promotion of alternative livelihoods at high altitude, local pressure and reduce local dependency on livestock. For this Tourism Department, local NGOs such as Ladakh Ecological Development Group (LEDeG), World Wildlife Fund and the Snow Leopard Conservancy (SLC) would promote community based eco-tourism, camping, trekking, handcraft, etc. in the concerned areas including Ti-Omorri in Kibdo, Changhang among others.

At the same time the workshop also decided to enforce total ban in all bio-diversity rich areas on detrimental activities like livestock grazing, poaching, driving and vehicle rallies, shooting, baseline, ban over flights and helicopters, etc. which are strictly necessary, are the present problems looming large over the entire Changhang range.

However, just two days after the workshop, a meeting was held at the office of Deputy Director of Tourism, Leh, re-visited that Govt of India’s Integrated Development of Tourism Circuit on Leh-Manali road meant just the opposite. Center’s action plan does not quite match its professional formulation of tourism policy reflecting the ecological concern along with the tourism promotion while involving community.

The meeting of concern authorities and a workshop session community representative decided upon setting up a network of information centers on Leh-Manali road all along the eco-tourism Changhang range.

The project have already selected 15 entry and five crores to set up way side facilities including cafes, restaurants, car and loads sheds, petrol pump, vehicular workshops, police posts, fair price shops, etc.

And similar arrangement is to be built ex-route and at zoo-ker and zoo-tor-morl lakes, the internationally recognized high altitude wetlands with highly fragile ecosystem. Leave aside any benefit to the nomads, here one can clearly imagine the detrimental effects to the fragile eco-system of Changhang with endangered species of fauna, mammal and“hottest” flora. Ti-o-morl is the highest Ramsar site in the world to mention as a barren landscape populated of Black-necked crane (Grus nigricollis), endemic to this region, and numbered 5000-6000 birds only. Thirteen pairs have been breeding regularly for last several years, including one pair each in zoo-tor and zoo-merl.

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