

Chief Secretary Dr Pawan Kotwal and Hon'ble CEC LAHDC Leh chairs high-level meeting to launch clean-up campaign along river Indus from Upshi to Phey

Leh, July 29: Chief Secretary of the Union Territory of Ladakh, Dr. Pawan Kotwal, chaired a high-level meeting to launch a comprehensive clean-up campaign along the Indus River, stretching from Upshi to Phey.

The meeting, held in collaboration with the Hon'ble Chief Executive Councillor, LAHDC Leh, Adv. Tashi Gyalson, emphasized a mission-mode approach toward achieving "Zero Tolerance Against Pollution" in the sacred and vital Indus River.

The campaign was initiated following a proposal from the Hon'ble CEC, who had recently called for a high-level administrative meeting to enforce legal mechanisms in safeguarding the river. Dr. Kotwal underscored the collective responsibility of civilians, defense personnel, tourists, and local communities in maintaining the sanctity and cleanliness of the Indus, which serves as the lifeline of Ladakh. He stressed that this campaign should not be symbolic but should bring about measurable impact and lasting behavioural change.

During the meeting, the Chief Secretary emphasized the urgent need to restrict the use of small plastic water bottles, advocating for a minimum 2-litre bottle standard to minimize waste generation. He directed that comprehensive awareness materials, including boards, advertisements, and pamphlets, be created to educate the public about the harmful effects of polluting the Indus. Noting the religious significance of the river, he suggested that religious leaders be engaged to influence and inspire the masses, as people often respond more readily to faith-based appeals.

Dr. Kotwal also emphasized the need for a strong legal framework to penalize those who pollute the river. He called upon paramilitary forces, the Indian Army, BRO, ITBP and the Indian Air Force to ensure the cleanliness of infrastructure areas along the riverbanks. Highlighting the importance of unity, he stated that success in any mission requires integrated and collaborative efforts.

The Chief Secretary instructed the Housing Secretary to deeply examine the functioning of treatment plants managed by the Air Force and civilian agencies and to prepare a detailed action plan for the campaign. He assured that all necessary equipment and machinery would be provided to concerned departments, if required, to strengthen enforcement and implementation.

Furthermore, Dr. Kotwal directed the Principal Secretary and Health Secretary to review hospital waste management systems to ensure that medical waste does not pollute the river ecosystem. He also stressed the importance of reviewing waste disposal practices followed by Army units, Air Force bases, ITBP camps, and BRO agencies across the district.

Deputy Commissioner Leh, Romil Singh Donk, elaborated on the two-week-long mission, mentioning that the campaign had already been discussed in a meeting chaired by the Hon'ble CEC with Goba and Nambardars from across the district. The mission will not only target the Indus but also focus on its tributaries like Zanskar, Singhey Lalok, and the Sham Valley. He added that the campaign will be a coordinated effort across all villages in the Leh district.

In his remarks, Hon'ble CEC Tashi Gyalson recalled spiritual appeals made in 2022 by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and, more recently, by Skyabgon Chezung Rinpoche, urging Ladakhis to keep the Indus clean. He stressed that the Indus is not merely a water body but a sacred site and a lifeline to countless lives in the region. The CEC noted that a large public awareness campaign will be led by Nambardars of different villages and highlighted the exemplary work of Project Tsangda, which has been actively managing waste in many areas.

CEC Gyalson raised specific concerns such as chicken sellers in Choglamsar dumping waste directly into the river and emphasized the urgent need for proper waste disposal facilities. He also highlighted instances of open defecation by workers associated with road projects like HIMANK and called upon the administration to ensure adequate sanitation facilities for them.

The CEC proposed the engagement of local entrepreneurs for plastic waste recycling to reduce dependence on external entities and encouraged strict action against wholesalers who fail to comply with environmental norms, including potential bans on their operations in Leh-Ladakh. He stressed the psychological and financial accountability of polluters and called for a robust enforcement mechanism.

As a major step forward, he announced that August 12th will be observed as a district-wide “Safai Andolan”, involving all schools and villages, to reinforce the importance of cleanliness and environmental responsibility.

Deputy Chairman of LAHDC Leh also voiced concerns about the negligence of certain BRO contractors who leave behind construction debris and fail to dispose of waste from labour camps. He emphasized the need for immediate corrective measures in such areas.

The meeting was attended by all Administrative Secretaries of UT Ladakh, Director General of Police UT Ladakh, Vice Chancellor of the University of Ladakh, GOC Sub Area Leh, IG ITBP UT Ladakh, AOC Air Force Station Leh, Deputy Commissioner/CEO LAHDC Leh, Senior Superintendent of Police Leh, Chief Engineers of Project HIMANK and Project VIJAYAK, Director Housing & Urban Development Department, Director Tourism, Director School Education, Director Rural Development, Member Secretary & Regional Director LPCC/WLW Leh, Chief Engineer PHE & I&FC, Assistant Director Tourism Leh, Executive Officer Municipal Committee Leh, and representatives from reputed NGOs and environmental organizations.



