

For first time in Ladakh, hefty penalty imposed on errant tourists for illegal off-roading in Pangong Lake and other protected wildlife areas of Ladakh

₹2 lakh penalty imposed on four offenders under Wildlife Protection Act

L-G VK Saxena urges tourists to be responsible and environmentally conscious while visiting Ladakh

Leh, June 28: Acting strictly against the rising menace of illegal off-roading, including cases of tourists driving cars in the ecologically sensitive lakes and river streams in Ladakh, the Ladakh Administration, on the directions of Lieutenant Governor Shri VK Saxena, has, for the first time, begun prosecuting and imposing hefty penalties on erring drivers.

On June 26, the Wildlife Department of Ladakh imposed a penalty of Rs 50,000 each on four vehicles that were found violating the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection). The offending vehicle owners from Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh were penalised for driving their cars illegally into the Pangong Lake and other protected wildlife zones in Changthang and Nubra in the last few days.

The total penalty imposed on them amounts to Rs 2 lakh. The penalty imposed on offending drivers reaffirms the Administration's commitment to protecting Ladakh's fragile ecosystem and endangered wildlife.

While cases of such illegal off-roading and stunts have been on the rise in recent times in Ladakh, it is for the first time that such a strict penalty has been imposed on the miscreants. In these cases, all four vehicles were impounded by officials after a thorough investigation, and their vehicles were released only after the penalty was paid.

The action follows a series of violations detected by wildlife officials during routine patrolling and through social media surveillance and reported to the LG Secretariat. The violations were reported at four separate locations under the Leh Wildlife Division—Merak and Lukung along the ecologically sensitive shores of Pangong Lake, Nurboo La in Hanle, and Sumur in Nubra Valley.

L-G Shri Saxena reiterated that while Ladakh warmly welcomes visitors from across the country and the world, tourists must be responsible and environmentally conscious. He urged tourists, adventure enthusiasts and vehicle owners not to venture into protected wildlife habitats, as such activities not only disturb endangered species and damage fragile ecosystems but also harm the sanctity of tourist places.

In the latest incident, on 23 June 2026, wildlife staff detected a Mahindra Thar (PB 11DD 7773) being driven off-road near Merak into the waters of the Pangong Lake. The driver had deliberately taken the vehicle into the water for stunt purposes, causing damage to critical wildlife habitat and polluting the lake. The driver was found prima facie guilty under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, and later, the vehicle was seized.

Similarly, on 21 June 2026, wildlife authorities acted swiftly after a video surfaced showing a Hyundai Creta (UP 81DD 4592) engaged in off-road driving near Lukung along Pangong Lake, within the Changthang Cold Desert Wildlife Sanctuary. The vehicle was finally intercepted at Zingral, Changla Pass, the same day and impounded.

Earlier, on 20 June 2026, another social media video showed a Mahindra Thar (PB-65BL-8698) driving through a stream inside the Karakoram (Nubra-Shayok) Wildlife Sanctuary, causing damage to the habitat and ecological integrity of the protected area. Following sustained intelligence gathering through local police, the vehicle was later intercepted and impounded at Kharu on 21 June.

Similarly, on 17 June 2026, a viral video circulating on social media showed a Toyota Fortuner (HP 37H 7888) being driven off-road near Nurboo La inside the Changthang Cold Desert Wildlife Sanctuary, with the driver reportedly chasing a Tibetan Gazelle. Wildlife officials immediately launched an overnight search in coordination with the Police and traced the vehicle outside a homestay in Hanle on the morning of 18 June.

Subsequently, the four offenders paid the penalty of Rs 50,000 each and got their vehicles released.

The Lieutenant Governor emphasised that off-road driving within or in the vicinity of protected areas is a punishable offence under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and warned that stringent action would continue against all such violators.

