

Chief Secretary calls for Global-Scale Black-necked Crane Festival rooted in Local Communities

Leh, June 25, 2026: Chief Secretary of the Union Territory of Ladakh, Ashish Kundra, today chaired a meeting to review the proposal for organizing the Black-necked Crane Festival 2026, aimed at promoting wildlife conservation, harmonious coexistence between communities and nature, and nature-based livelihoods across the Changthang region of Ladakh.

The proposed festival, planned for the second half of August 2026, seeks to celebrate the iconic Black-necked Crane while showcasing the ecological, cultural, and economic significance of Ladakh's high-altitude wetlands. The festival is envisioned as a platform to strengthen conservation awareness, encourage sustainable tourism, and create livelihood opportunities for local communities.

The meeting began with a detailed presentation by the concerned officers highlighting the rationale behind the festival and the global importance of the Changthang wetlands ecosystem. The presentation emphasized the Black-necked Crane as a symbol of harmony between biodiversity, culture, and spirituality in the Trans-Himalayan region. It also explored the growing global bird tourism economy, projected tourism revenue opportunities, lessons from Bhutan's successful Black-necked Crane Festival, and the vision and objectives for Ladakh's proposed festival.

The presentation further outlined the concept of developing five key crane destinations in Changthang, proposed festival activities, birdwatching experiences, field visits, technical sessions, livelihood exhibitions, cultural programmes, and strategies to position Ladakh as a premier bird tourism destination. Budgetary requirements and promotional plans were also discussed.

During the deliberations, the Chief Secretary underscored the immense potential of bird tourism as a growing global sector and stressed the need for Ladakh to leverage its unique biodiversity assets in a sustainable manner. He sought details regarding the selection of festival dates and suggested that the event be aligned with the period most suitable for crane sightings and visitor participation. He also explored the possibility of integrating an international component into the festival to attract researchers, conservationists, birdwatchers, photographers, and nature enthusiasts from across India and abroad.

Shri Kundra emphasized that the festival should remain focused on the Changthang region, where the Black-necked Crane and its habitat are intrinsically linked to local culture and livelihoods. He directed the organizers to ensure meaningful participation of local communities, conservation organizations, birding groups, educational institutions, and tourism stakeholders in planning and executing the event.

Highlighting the importance of community-led conservation, the Chief Secretary stressed that local residents must emerge as primary beneficiaries of the initiative. He proposed the development of trained local nature guides and birding interpreters from Changthang villages, particularly among unemployed youth, to assist visitors in exploring the region's vast landscapes and wildlife habitats.

Such initiatives, he noted, would not only enhance visitor experiences but also generate sustainable livelihood opportunities for local communities. He noted that the festival should serve as a platform for inspiring future conservation leaders while creating awareness about the ecological significance of Ladakh's wetlands.

Infrastructure and visitor facilities were also reviewed during the meeting. Shri Kundra stressed the need for developing bird observation points, interpretation centres, improved visitor amenities, eco-friendly accommodation options, and clearly marked wildlife viewing sites. He directed the concerned departments to examine possibilities for enhancing existing facilities at Nyoma, Hanle, and other key locations to support nature tourism and research activities.

Recognizing the importance of effective outreach, the Chief Secretary directed that a dedicated and professionally designed website for the Black-necked Crane Festival be developed on a fast-track basis within one week. The website will serve as a central information platform for visitors, researchers, photographers, tour operators, and conservation enthusiasts, providing details on festival activities, travel information, birdwatching opportunities, and community-based tourism experiences. He further instructed the Tourism Department to integrate bird tourism and Black-necked Crane-related content prominently into Ladakh's tourism promotion platforms.

The Chief Secretary advised the organizers to restructure the festival concept note and presentation with greater emphasis on conservation-linked livelihoods, community participation, and sustainable tourism opportunities before presenting the proposal to the Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor for further consideration and inauguration planning.

The meeting was attended by Shri Mandeep Mittal, IFS; Shri Rajesh, IFS; Shri Sanjeet Rodrigues, Secretary, Tourism Department; and senior officers from the concerned departments and organizations.

