

LG Ladakh chairs 15th State Board for Wildlife Meeting Says National security paramount; directs for formation of Committee for Protection of Core Wildlife Areas

Leh, January 29: The Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh, Shri Kavinder Gupta, chaired the 15th meeting of the State Board for Wildlife at the Lieutenant Governor's Secretariat today, underscoring that national security remains paramount while undertaking any wildlife conservation and boundary rationalisation exercise in the Union Territory.

During the meeting, the Hon'ble Lt Governor led detailed deliberations on critical wildlife conservation issues, with particular focus on the rationalisation of boundaries of wildlife sanctuaries in Ladakh. He emphasised the need to strike a balanced, pragmatic approach that safeguards national security interests, protects local community livelihoods, and ensures effective conservation of Ladakh's unique and endangered wildlife.

At the outset, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Shri S. Rajesh, briefed the Board on its mandate, agenda items, and initiatives undertaken by the Forest, Ecology and Environment Department. These included rescue and rehabilitation of wild animals from April to December 2025, mitigation of human-wildlife conflict, wildlife studies, issuance of protection advisories, and participation in meetings of the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife for project clearances.

The Hon'ble Lt Governor took note of the agenda presented by Wildlife Warden Shri Mandeep Mittal regarding the rationalisation of boundaries of Karakoram (Nubra-Shayok) Wildlife Sanctuary and High Altitude Cold Desert (Changthang Wildlife) Sanctuary. The presentation highlighted inconsistencies in the original 1987 notifications and boundaries of both wildlife sanctuaries and Hemis National Park. The Lt Governor was briefed on the process initiated after the formation of the Union Territory and the assessment work undertaken by the Wildlife Institute of India for the rationalisation of the boundaries of the wildlife sanctuaries.

During extensive discussions, the Hon'ble Lt Governor carefully considered concerns raised by stakeholders, including the Army, paramilitary forces, police, local communities, and wildlife experts. It was noted that existing proposals could potentially bring a significant portion of Ladakh's land area under protected zones, creating operational, developmental, and administrative challenges.

The Hon'ble Lt Governor acknowledged the Army's commitment to wildlife conservation and concurred that operational and strategic areas critical to national security must be kept outside protected zones, especially in sensitive border regions. He also took cognisance of issues raised by Ladakh Police regarding development initiatives, including the Vibrant Village Programme and administrative restructuring.

Renowned wildlife expert Dr M.K. Ranjitsinh highlighted Ladakh's status as a national heritage landscape and stressed the need for clearly defined core conservation zones, seasonal wildlife corridors, and strategic exclusion of areas necessary for security and community needs. Other experts and officials echoed the need for scientific and rational boundary rationalisation.

Concluding the meeting, the Hon'ble Lt Governor categorically stated that national security will be the overriding consideration in finalising wildlife sanctuary boundaries. He directed the immediate formation of a committee involving local communities, under the supervision of the Chief Secretary, to identify and delineate core wildlife areas while excluding Army settlements and essential habitations. The committee has been instructed to submit its report within four months.

The Hon'ble Lt Governor further directed joint sensitisation programmes between the Army and the Wildlife Department to promote conservation of high-value and endangered species and ensure coordinated efforts on the ground.

Among those present during the meeting, both physically and virtually, were Chief Secretary Shri Ashish Kundra, Dr M.K. Ranjitsinh, former PCCF Ladakh Shri Jigmet Takpa, APCCF Shri S. Rajesh, SSP Shri Altaf Ahmad Shah, Deputy GOC Sub Area Leh (14 Corps) Brigadier Ajay Katoch, Wildlife Warden Shri Mandeep Mittal, Director Tourism Shri Tsering Paldan, Director Snow Leopard Conservancy Shri Tsewang Namgail, officials from the Wildlife Institute of India and Zoological Survey of India, along with senior officers and wildlife experts.

