

L-G VK Saxena inaugurates nation's first Black-Necked Crane Festival

Event aims conservation and sustainable livelihoods of world's only alpine crane

Festival seeks to strengthen linkages between wildlife conservation, local economy and community-led eco-tourism

Leh, August 11: Lieutenant Governor, Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena, today inaugurated the nation's first "Black-Necked Crane Festival 2026" in Ladakh, an initiative aimed at conserving the endangered Black-Necked Crane and strengthening environmental protection, economic welfare and sustainable livelihoods of local communities.

The festival witnessed the participation of conservationists, researchers and experts from India and foreign countries, including those from the United Nations. Experts from Bhutan and Nepal, which have a sizable population of Black-necked Cranes, are also participating in the festival.

There are around 16,000 Black-Necked Cranes distributed across India, Bhutan, China and Nepal. The Black-Necked Crane is the world's only alpine crane, adapted to some of the highest and most challenging environments on earth. Ladakh is the only breeding habitat of the species in India, making the Union Territory critically important for its conservation.

Recognising its ecological and cultural significance, the UT Administration has declared the Black-Necked Crane as the State Bird of Ladakh. The species is also regarded as a symbol of peace, further strengthening its significance as an ambassador of Ladakh's unique natural heritage.

Addressing the festival, L-G Shri Saxena said that conservation of the Black-Necked Crane cannot be separated from the protection of Ladakh's wetlands, grasslands and high-altitude ecosystems. He said that wetlands such as Tso Kar, Hanle and other breeding landscapes are not merely habitats for wildlife but ecological systems that support biodiversity, regulate water systems and sustain pastoral communities. Protecting the crane therefore also means protecting the environment and livelihoods that depend upon these landscapes.

The Lieutenant Governor emphasised that local communities must be recognised as partners, custodians and champions of conservation, rather than merely beneficiaries of conservation programmes. He called for greater integration of traditional local knowledge and modern scientific methods to achieve effective conservation. "The Black-Necked Crane is much more than a bird. It is a symbol of peace, an ambassador of our high-altitude ecosystem and a bridge between wildlife conservation and the well-being of our communities. Our goal must be to protect nature while creating sustainable opportunities for the people who have safeguarded these landscapes for generations," said L-G Shri Saxena.

He also highlighted the potential of responsible birdwatching, nature tourism, wildlife photography, local handicrafts and traditional products to create sustainable economic opportunities for communities. The Community Knowledge Circle and Community Eco-Market organised as part of the festival were cited as examples of connecting conservation with culture and local livelihoods.

The Lieutenant Governor said that Ladakh must pursue the principle of "more value from nature, with less pressure on nature", ensuring that tourism and economic activity do not degrade the very ecosystems that attract visitors to the region.

The festival also highlighted the need to protect breeding grounds and wetlands from pollution, unregulated tourism, and other pressures, while raising public awareness of the ecological importance of the species.

L-G Shri Saxena also released knowledge products on the black-necked crane, including the Black-necked Crane: India Book, Black-necked Crane: Bhutan Book, a coffee table book on the black-necked crane, an action plan on conservation of the black-necked crane and its habitat, status and distribution of black-necked crane, bird economy status report, Leh, Ladakh, release of a special postal cover and cancellation in collaboration with India Post on the black-necked crane, and release of Ladakh declaration for black-necked crane conservation.



