

12 bikers fined ₹1.20 lakh in Ladakh for illegal off-roading in protected wildlife areas

One SUV owner too penalised ₹50,000 for damaging fragile ecosystem

L-G Vinai Kumar Saxena urges tourists to enjoy Ladakh responsibly and help preserve its pristine ecology and wildlife

Leh, July 14: Continuing its stringent action against the growing menace of illegal off-roading in wildlife-protected areas, the Ladakh Administration, in a first-of-its-kind action against motorcycle groups, has fined 12 bikers with a penalty of Rs 1.20 lakh – Rs 10,000 each – for illegally venturing into protected ecologically-sensitive zones around near Lake Moriri. Another tourist driving an SUV near Pangong Lake has also been penalised with Rs 50,000 for violating the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

On 4 July 2026, wildlife officials detected a group of 12 bikers, belonging to a Gurugram-based tour operator – “Wanderon Experiences Pvt Ltd”, illegally riding off-road in proximity to Tso Moriri, an ecologically sensitive wetland falling within the Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary. The group was found to violate Section 29 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. The offence was compounded under Section 54 upon payment of a total penalty of ₹1.20 lakh, amounting to ₹10,000 per motorcycle.

Earlier, on 30 June 2026, during routine patrolling near Man Village along Pangong Lake, Wildlife Department officials intercepted a Mahindra XUV 3XO bearing Uttar Pradesh registration number UP12CA5111, which was found being driven illegally off-road close to the lake within the Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary. The vehicle was seized under Section 50 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. The driver, a resident of Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, was imposed a penalty of ₹50,000, and the impounded vehicle was released after payment was made.

Over the last few years, Ladakh has emerged as one of the country's most sought-after destinations for motorcycle enthusiasts. However, alongside this growth in tourism, authorities have witnessed an alarming rise in instances of tourists venturing into protected wildlife areas, driving through fragile wetlands, lake shores and sensitive habitats, causing irreversible damage to Ladakh's unique ecosystem and disturbing wildlife.

L-G Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena stated that Ladakh's mountains, lakes, rivers and wildlife were among its greatest treasures and belonged not only to its people but to the entire nation. "We wholeheartedly welcome every visitor who comes to experience the unparalleled beauty, culture and hospitality of Ladakh. I urge all tourists to enjoy our breathtaking landscapes and unique wildlife responsibly and refrain from any activity that harms our fragile ecology or disturbs protected habitats. The Administration will continue to promote tourism, but equally, we shall enforce the law firmly against those who endanger Ladakh's priceless natural heritage," Shri Saxena said.

The strict enforcement comes in the wake of the directions of Lieutenant Governor Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena to curb illegal off-roading and protect Ladakh's environmentally fragile landscapes. The initiative has gained further momentum following the recent deployment of the Ladakh Environment Protection Force (EPF), comprising 100 Ex-servicemen authorised to monitor ecologically sensitive areas and issue on-the-spot challans against violators.

Both violations were detected through vigilant patrolling by Wildlife Department personnel and wildlife informers, reflecting the Administration's strengthened surveillance mechanism across protected landscapes.