

# VILLAGES ALONG CHINA BORDER TO OPEN FOR TOURISM

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Stargazers' delight: Villages in Ladakh can be turned into dark sky destination that could attract astronomy enthusiasts. AFP/ MOHD ARHAAN ARCHER | Photo Credit: MOHD ARHAAN ARCHER

The Union government plans to open the villages along the Chinese border for tourists under the Vibrant Village programme announced in the Union Budget 2022-23.

Recently, the Union Home Ministry held a meeting with public representatives of such villages from the States of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and the Union Territory of Ladakh.

A senior government official said the Budget provisions for the programme had been sent to the Expenditure Finance Committee for its approval after which the scheme would be presented before the Union Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Tashi Gyalsen, chief executive councillor of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC), told *The Hindu* that a pre-exercise on plan formulation is under way at the district level in order to strengthen every border village.

"Some villages in Ladakh such as those in Changthang region can be turned into dark sky destination that could attract astronomy enthusiasts. Since the terrain is tough, several measures will have to be taken to improve the facilities for tourists," Mr. Gyalsen who represents the BJP in the LAHDC, said.

On February 23, at a virtual meeting organised by the Rural Development Ministry, a senior Home Ministry official said that for economic activities under the scheme, "emphasis be given on tourism and culture".

## Various schemes

"In the Vibrant Villages programme, schemes related to livelihood generation, road connectivity, housing, rural infrastructure, renewable energy, television and broadband connections should be undertaken," the official stated.

A Parliamentary Committee on Home Affairs in its December 2021 report had recommended that all villages in Ladakh, particularly those located in Zero-Border such as Chumar and Demchok, should be electrified "in order to stop migration of people from these areas".

According to the report, of the 236 habitable villages in Ladakh, only 172 have telecom infrastructure and "only 24 and 78 villages have 3G and 4G Internet connectivity", respectively. Konchok Stanzin, councillor of Chushul in eastern Ladakh, said there are 19 villages along border village that have nil or partial communication facilities. China has established several new villages along the LAC in the past few years particularly across the Arunachal Pradesh border.

Another government official said the Vibrant Village programme was a counter to China's model villages but the name has been carefully chosen so as to not cause any consternation in the

neighbouring country.

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