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Illegal construction in wildlife sanctuary

Dalhousie, December 3

Illegal constructions are mushrooming in the famous Kalatop-Khajjiar wildlife sanctuary in Chamba district. Raising of structures inside the sanctuary area is violative of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. The eco-system sanctuary has been affected by grazing, sporadic road constructions, commercial exploitation of forests and clandestine hunting. The sanctuary having deodar forest in an area of 20 sq. km (2,728 hectares), is located at altitudes ranging from 1950 to 2850 metres.

Musk deer, barking deer, black bear, leopard, goral, serow, koklas, and pheasants such as monal, koklas, kaleej and chukor can be seen in the sanctuary. Besides, migratory birds of the wetland species also visit the Khajjiar Lake situated amidst a bald glade of the sanctuary. The sanctuary is being looked after by a divisional forest officer (DFO) based at Chamba. Specialists from the School for Environmental Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, have suggested revival of the lake on an integrated watershed basis.

Oct 29 / The tribune /

Haphazard growth Khajjiar's bane

Balkrishan Prashar

KHAJJIAR (CHAMBA): The wildlife sanctuary of Kalatop-Khajjiar in Chamba district is sick these days. Human settlements in the sanctuary area have shown grave disregard to nature and wild beasts. The famous Khajjiar lake, the main water source in the sanctuary area where wild animals used to come at night to quench their thirst, has railings and barbed wire around it. As a result wild animals are now afraid of taking water in the lake.

Many works done in the name of development in and around the Kalatop-Khajjiar wildlife habitat have disturbed wild beasts as well as the eco-system, nature lovers observe. Haphazard housing is a serious threat to Khajjiar. It appears that the entire system has failed due to complicated legal procedures to curb the menace. Situated at an altitude of about 2150 metres, Khajjiar has a picturesque setting surrounded by deodars on hill slopes. It has a beautiful lake amid a verdant glade, with an ancient temple alongside of Khajji Naga, which dates back to the 11th century. This quiet hill resort, accessible by a metalled road, is 24 km from Dalhousie and 22 km from Chamba, the district headquarters. The area under a thick forest cover near the glade of the beautiful Khajjiar lake on the Khajjiar-Chamba road is being overburdened with massive structures turning it into a concrete jungle.

Multi-storeyed hotels constructed right on the road are becoming hazardous to vehicular as well as pedestrian traffic. The thick forest cover is being eaten into by numerous high-rise structures coming up here and there, distorting the visual impact of the surrounding scenic beauty.

If the present state of affairs continues, the future of the landscape of Khajjiar seems uncertain. There is apprehension that these slopes, made of loose soil, may not be able to withstand heavy pressure, thereby increasing the chances of massive landslips.

The state government has constituted a Special Area Development Authority (SADA) for the planned development of Khajjiar, taking into account the stringent provisions of the Himachal Pradesh Town and Country Planning Act. An official spokesman maintains SADA would do everything possible under the law to preserve the charm of this hill resort. But it is alleged that the HP Town and Country Planning Act lacks political and public support.

