

Tourism projects a bane for local community: report

Tourism development projects propagated as eco-friendly and employment generating adversely affect the local community's rights, livelihood and access to resources, says a report prepared by 150 civil society groups.

The report, released Friday, called "Divided Destiny Unequal Lives: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Indian State", is in response to a government report which was submitted to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) for the upcoming India review.

The report observes that tourism projects in India that displace indigenous communities adversely affect peoples' lives.

Citing examples, it says a multi-million dollar project to build a huge statue of Buddha and develop the area of Kasya, where Buddha is believed to have spent his last days in Kushinagar (Uttar Pradesh) as a tourist spot, threatens to displace 700 families from 600 acres of cultivable land.

Tourism projects have displaced locals from areas like Mithabao, Shiroda, Tarkali and Malwan in Maharashtra giving rise to anti-tourism protests, it says.

The report also states an example of the Taj Fort Aguada Resort in Goa which has used 73 acres of land on Calangute beach and is a major tourist attraction.

"This has adversely affected the earnings of small shack owners and communities dependent on fishing. Gains of subsidised land, tax concessions, import advantages, often at the cost of rights of workers and indigenous people, have caused the local community to gain very little," it said.

Diversion of people's essential needs like agricultural land and access to natural and common resources like forests, beaches, oceans and lakes as well as diversion of water and electricity to hotels, lodges and amusement parks have increased the cost of living for the locals.

The report goes on to add that abuse of women and children in many pockets can be directly linked to the tourism trade.

Priti Darooka, one of those involved in compilation of this report, said that its aim was to pose relevant questions to the Indian government during the review by the CESCR.

"The aim of this report is to make the Indian government accountable for the promises it made under the international treaty body of CESCR in 1979. Although the covenant requires the member states to submit a report every five years, after the initial report, it's after nearly two decades that India submitted its report," said Darooka.

"With this NGO report, under the section of tourism, we seek to question the government on how it ensures development initiatives without causing loss of livelihood and displacement of the local population," she added.

The international treaty committee is set to review India's report, which it submitted in 2006, on May 7 and 8.

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