

No snow-causing chemicals for Himalayan ski resort

Belying fears that an upcoming ski resort in India's western Himalayas would adversely impact on the environment, a Finnish expert associated with the project says only natural methods would be used to create artificial snow to ensure the slopes are open round-the-year.

'Our natural system for freezing water ensures that chemicals of any kind are not used for creating artificial snow,' said Mikko Martikainen, managing director of Snow Secure Ltd, a company that focuses on providing guaranteed snow for ski resorts worldwide.

Martikainen has 40 years experience in the field and is popularly known as Finland's 'snow professor'. His is one of the many Finnish companies associated with the 350-million euro Himalayan Ski Village (HSV) that American billionaire Alfred Ford is creating in Manali region of Himachal Pradesh.

'With our pure snow technology, snow is manufactured from water without using any chemicals or other substances harmful to nature,' Martikainen told IANS.

Explaining the technology, he said water is taken from a lake or river adjacent to a resort and first passed through a tank where it is subjected to ultraviolet rays to remove any impurities that may exist.

'This water is then sprayed into the air in tiny mist-like drops that freeze into snow when the temperature is at sub-zero. In spring, when the snow melts, the purified water returns to nature again,' Martikainen added.

His company, which has a presence in many ski resorts in Finland, the Swiss Alps and in South Africa, has also offered to assist HSV with its expertise in snow storage.

'We have perfected a method under which anything between 10,000 and 100,000 tonnes can be stored by covering it with insulating material like sawdust to ensure minimal melting. This snow can then be used as and where required,' Martikainen explained.

'Snow secure would like to help the Himalayan Ski Village in finding answers to snow related problems in ecologically the best way possible,' he stated.

The Himalayan Ski Village will include luxury hotels, chalets, suites, conference facilities, an entertainment centre, restaurants and retail options. Access to the mountain area for skiing, trekking and other adventure activities will be provided by a network of gondolas and chairlifts.

The project aims to employ more than 3,500 people when fully developed and HSV will hire more than 70 percent of them from the villages around Manali.

A group of environmentalists in Manali claim the resort would damage the ecology of the area because chemicals would be used to manufacture artificial snow.

HSV managing director John Sims denies this, saying the issue had been adequately addressed in the detailed project report (DPR) the Himachal Pradesh government had cleared earlier this month.

'The DPR emphasises HSV's commitment to promote socially and environmentally responsible tourism. It lists specific strategies we will employ to mitigate the impact on the environment during both the construction and operation of the project,' maintained Sims, a childhood buddy of Ford.

'The fact that the state government has accepted the DPR should adequately clear any misconceptions there might be,' he added.

The DPR will now go to the Pollution Control Board and the ministry of environment and forests before HSV gets the final go ahead to start building the resort.

'This will make it clear that we are going to great lengths to ensure there is no adverse impact on the environment,' Sims pointed out.

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