

Anjaw: Of progress kept at bay by red tape

TOURISM POTENTIAL Though this district in Arunachal has everything a nature-lover could want, nothing is being done to promote it – depriving the area of revenue and its people of jobs

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HAWAII (ANJAW DIST, ARUNACHAL): It is a classic case of putting the cart before the horse.

This relatively young district in the north-eastern corner of the country has no tourism department or policy in place, and the visitors who come on their own are few. Yet, nestled amid the pine forests at Hot Spring, near Dong, with the Lohit flowing by its side, are two extravagant tourist facilities.

The facilities were created a few years after the Anjaw district came into existence in 2004. Located about 70 km from Hawaii, the district headquarters, one of the structures seems like a huge palatial cafeteria – complete with a bath, dressing room and dormitory. The other is a set of six aesthetically-designed sloping roof huts raised on concrete pillars.

The facilities were sanctioned in 2007-08 for tourism infrastructure development from a non-lapsable central pool of resources, costing ₹2.5 crore to the exchequer. This included work on an approach road and a wall for protection from floods.

Everything looks good, except for the fact that the facilities are yet to be opened even two years after completion of infrastructure work.

Needless to say, the area has huge potential for tourism. If you walk

past the Hot Spring, which is known to have medicinal properties, and cross a suspension bridge across the mighty Lohit, you come to the quaint Dong village. A day's trek eastward from Dong takes you to the plateau that witnesses India's first sunrise.

Barely an hour's drive towards the north from this humongous facility is Kaho, the last village on the Indian side.



■ The tourist facilities at Hot Spring, sanctioned in 2007-08, cost the exchequer ₹2.5 crore. Though the infrastructural work is complete, they are yet to be opened to the public.

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Across the Chinese border, one can see little Tibetan villages dotting the horizon. Walong, situated just 10 km away, has a memorial that pays homage to Indian soldiers who laid down their lives in the 1962 war against China.

However, seven years after its creation, the district does not seem to have exploited its potential for tourism. CS Jainow, Anjaw deputy commissioner, admits, "As of now, most of the tourists who come are due to word-of-mouth publicity."

Private bidders have already started pressing the administration for contracts to the facilities at Dong. "(But) only the district tourism officer can decide that. Our proposal for DTO's post is pending at Itanagar," Jainow says.

"The state is to be blamed for the lack of a proper tourism policy. The Arunachal government has not given any thought to developing the east-

ern circuit," says Manoj Jalan of Purvi Discovery, a tour company.

Arunachal can take a leaf out of Nagaland's book, and do away with restricted area permits for foreign tourists, says Jalan, adding: "Better road connectivity will also help."

Three years ago, Jalan had started an eco-tourism project in partnership with a Mishmi entrepreneur, Rohinso Krisikro from Wakro, in Lohit district. While Krisikro built a Mishmi-style bamboo guesthouse with modern facilities, the responsibility of bringing in tourists lay with Jalan.

Similar experiments can also be tried in Anjaw, providing employment opportunities to local youth. But, when asked about this, Jainow just says: "We will go for systematic promotion only after getting a district tourism officer."

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