

China to open Nathu La pass tomorrow for Kailash pilgrims

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Yadong (Tibet): China and India will open the Nathu La border point in Sikkim tomorrow to enable pilgrims to travel Kailash-Manasarovar by bus from the border without the ordeal of trekking and travelling on horse backs.

The first batch of 44 pilgrims and support staff will tomorrow enter China from this point, about 31 km from here.

An elaborate ceremony has been planned to welcome them, which will be attended by Chinese Ambassador to India Le Yucheng and diplomats from the Indian Embassy in Beijing.

The agreement to open the second route was reached during last year's visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to India.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had urged him earlier to open the route to reduce the difficulties.

Modi wanted a second route for the Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra, keeping in view the terrain difficulties through the existing routes through Uttarakhand and Nepal which involved arduous journey involving heavy tracking or by mules.

Earlier, the Yatra being organised by External Affairs Ministry goes through Lipu Pass in Himalays connecting the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand in India with the old trading town of Taklakot in Tibet.

The Ministry permits over 1,000 pilgrims a year in 18 batches involving a 22-day journey.

The Nathu La route will enable pilgrims to travel 1,500 km long route from Nathu La to Kailash by buses.

Ahead of tomorrow's event, Le has become the first Chinese official today to cross over from Nathu La into China.

He arrived here travelling through Sikkim.

He told the Indian media here today that 250 people will be allowed in five batches to visit Kailash this year.

The numbers could doubled from next year once the infrastructure like hotels is improve in the remote place.

The pilgrims are charged nominal amounts and Chinese central government and his embassy has allocated funds to subsidise the Indian pilgrims travel, he said.

About the border trade at Nathu La, he said this year had a better trading volumes.

He had a meeting with Sikkim Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling and discussed steps to improve the trade.

The two sides considered proposals double the present list of goods to be traded.

Le said the present volume of over USD 70 billion bilateral trade is inadequate do not represent the potential.

The trade set grow with more Chinese investment in India, he said.

This border town Yadong is flourishing with India-China border trade with number of traders settled here to carry on the business.

- PTI