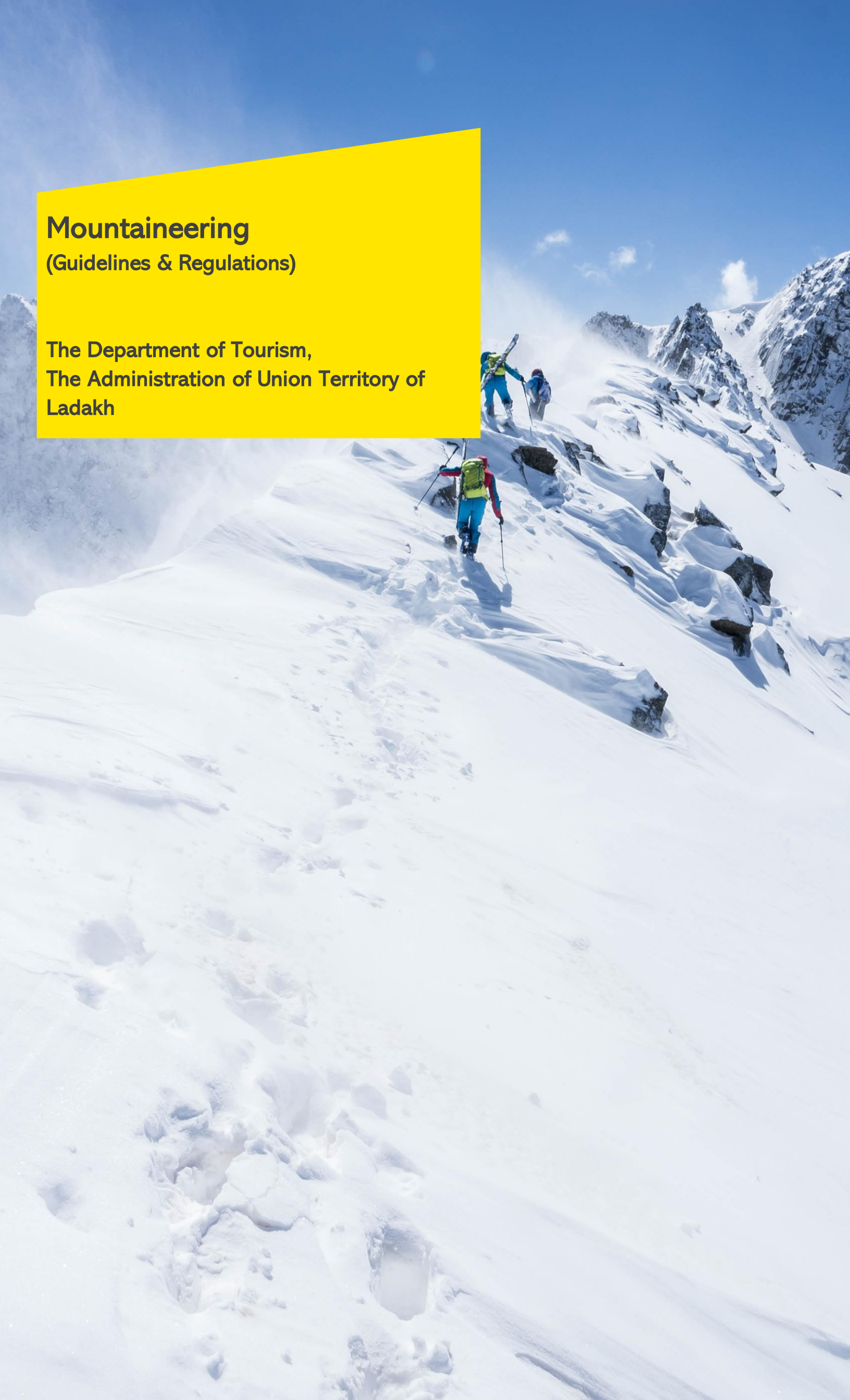


Mountaineering

(Guidelines & Regulations)

**The Department of Tourism,
The Administration of Union Territory of
Ladakh**



MOUNTAINEERING IN LADAKH

The adventure of mountain climbing cannot get any better than in Ladakh. Nestled between the Himalayas, Zaskar, and the Karakoram Ranges, Ladakh is an ultimate paradise for mountain expeditions, who are looking for some of the most challenging and adrenaline-rushing climbing experiences in the world. One can choose the mountain expedition across various grades.

The challenging topography and beautiful landscapes of Ladakh intrigue and motivate climbers globally, by providing an array of mountains to climb which ranges at different altitude levels. The altitude level for mountains specifically for mountain climbers in Ladakh is ranging from 5,000 Mt. to 7,500 Mt.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh to streamline and promote adventure activities in Ladakh in a regulated manner is issuing the Guidelines & Regulations for carrying out Mountaineering. These guidelines shall extend to the whole of the Union Territory of Ladakh and come into force from the date of its notification.

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh recommends following the guidelines & regulations for Mountaineering, issued by the Adventure Tour Operators Associations of India (ATOAI) and endorsed by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

These guidelines will act as a defining force with respect to the procedures to be followed, mandatory trainings for guides/instructors, equipment to be used, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), necessary documentation, risk mitigation processes, addressing medical concerns, emergencies, rescue operations, safety briefing, etc. All Adventure Tour Operators (ATOs) shall follow these guidelines while conducting Mountaineering in the Union Territory of Ladakh.

VALIDITY

The 'Guidelines & Regulation for Mountaineering' will remain valid for five (5) years, from the date of its notification. All Adventure Tour Operators (ATOs) are advised to strictly adhere to the terms and conditions of these guidelines and follow its best implementation for the sustainable development of the adventure tourism ecosystem in the Union Territory of Ladakh.

ENCLOSURES

- Annexure 1 – Guidelines & Regulations for Mountaineering in the Union Territory of Ladakh
- Annexure 2 – Implementation Framework for the Union Territory of Ladakh

ANNEXURE 1

GUIDELINES & REGULATIONS FOR MOUNTAINEERING

1. INTRODUCTION

India has 73 percent of the Himalayan range with a huge potential for mountaineering expeditions. Mountaineering is an activity for which the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) is responsible to the Government of India through the Foreigner's act and other statutes. All tour operators must keep abreast of the guidelines given by IMF from time to time. These guidelines apply for both guided commercial expeditions and overseas expeditions booked by recognized adventure tour operators.

2. GUIDES / INSTRUCTORS

Lead guides and instructors who are leading mountaineering activities should, as a minimum, hold valid certificates in the following:

1. A minimum 16-hour (2-day) First Aid/ CPR course provided by a recognized and qualified provider.
2. Completed the Advanced Mountaineering Course from any of the National Mountaineering Institutes and carry a certificate duly authenticated by an IMF recognized body OR IMF accredited tour operator stating that the individual "has experience of 3 years in assisting mountaineering expeditions at altitudes of 6000m min 5/8 climbs above 6000m reflected in a logbook duly authenticated/ validated by the operator and the clients".
3. Maintain a logbook containing authenticated records of mountaineering experience.
4. All guides have a comprehensive understanding of altitude sickness, recognizing its symptoms, treatment, and knowledge of appropriate medication is essential to work at high altitudes.
5. They should also have a sound knowledge of cold weather problems like hypothermia/ frostbite.

3. EQUIPMENT

1. The correct use and proper maintenance of climbing equipment are essential for conducting mountaineering activities and should never be taken lightly.
2. Equipment, especially safety equipment should be of the highest standard available and preferably certified by ISI or an international body like CE or UIAA.
3. Rope – There are many different types of ropes. The operator and leader must have sound knowledge of the specifically designed climbing rope, including the different types and applications. Climbing rope comes in different diameters and specifications but the basics are dynamic, semi-static, and static. A safe working load of 25KN (2.5 tons) and CE approval is the internationally recognized standard for climbing ropes.
4. Hardware (anchors, carabineers, belay devices, etc.) – There is a wide range of climbing aids and devices, and the operator and instructor must have sound knowledge of their applications including which devices are necessary to conduct mountaineering activities safely. These devices are also a "link" in the safety chain. As per all other climbing equipment items, a safe working load of 25 KN (2.5 tons) and CE approval is the internationally recognized standard for climbing hardware and devices.
5. All equipment is subject to wear and tear and must be checked before every use. Incorrect storage, use, and monitoring of rated and approved equipment is usually the cause of equipment failure. Operators and leaders must have sound knowledge of this and have systems in place to control and manage their equipment.

4. INSPECTIONS & MAINTENANCE PROCEDURES

Inspections and maintenance require a sound knowledge of the systems and equipment themselves and therefore must be carried out by qualified persons. As a minimum, the inspector must be qualified to be a guide/instructor. Basic inspections must be carried out before every use with complete and detailed inspections carried out regularly in accordance with their operations procedures and risk assessments.

5. SOPs & OPERATING INSTRUCTIONS

All Mountaineering Tour Operators must maintain and update a Standard Operating Procedure for their operations and get the same vetted by IMF from time to time.

Besides covering the methodologies that are adopted by the agency in organizing the expedition, such as assessing members' qualifications, medical conditions, and experience, procedures for obtaining various permissions, travel to the mountain, maintenance of base camp including hygiene, avoidance of high altitude sickness, safety precautions, communication, weather reports, the procedure for emergencies, casualty evacuation, incident and accident reporting, and feedback mechanism, the following must be included in the SOPs:

1. The guiding staff and porters on the mountain and the material supplied must be adequate for the aims of the party and the stated level of service offered.

2. An experienced doctor at the party is desirable but at the very least advance arrangements must be known for medical help. Advance arrangements must also be made for evacuation assistance in case of an emergency.
3. Advertising must give a true picture of all the difficulties and dangers involved and avoid promising the impossible. If an expedition is commercially launched by an operator, then the biographical information about the guiding team should be included.
4. The client must truthfully reveal his experience, supported by documentation/photographs, medical history, etc. to the organizer so that the organizer can make an informed choice about the potential client.
5. Information supplied in advance will include a clear statement of the guiding, porters, and equipment which will be supplied by the organizer, together with details of the clothing and equipment to be supplied by the client. This is not in the context of the operators' assisting expeditions with logistics alone.

6. DOCUMENTATION

The tour operator must maintain, at the minimum the following documentation:

1. Details of all Guides and Instructors including, copies of certifications, a record of experience, and feedback from clients
2. Copies of all Permits, Permissions of current expeditions
3. Copies of identification documents, insurance cover, medical concerns, and details of next of kin for all participants, guides, and instructors
4. Copy of SOP
5. Current list of emergency contact numbers
6. Emergency Action Plan

7. RISK MITIGATION

To mitigate the risk of high altitude, the following is advised:

1. Participants should be physically and medically fit.
2. To ensure that at least one or two members of the expedition have experience in high-altitude climbing.
3. To provide wireless sets or take on hire from IMF, for communication between camps on the mountain and the base camp.
4. To bring radio receiving sets in case weather forecasts by All India Radio are required to be arranged by the IMF.
5. To ensure that environmental safeguards are implemented in their program so that the area and peak visited by them suffer no damage and are left clean for subsequent expeditions.
6. Environment guidelines provided by IMF shall be followed strictly.

8. EMERGENCIES AND RESCUES

In addition:

1. Adequate first aid medical equipment must be available. Pulse Oximeters are to be part of the FA kit.
2. Evacuation routes must identify and be known to participants, guides, and instructors of the team.
3. A detailed and documented Emergency Action Plan must be available at the base camp along with the closest available emergency services which can be called upon as required.
4. Oxygen and OR Gamow Bag (PAC/ Certec etc) to be at base camp for emergencies.
5. Walki-talkies at base camp and with the group whenever they are out climbing and all the camps where climbers are.
6. Routes with high avalanche risks or a history of avalanche accidents should carry Avalanche transceivers, Shovels & probes also.
7. The operator must announce the maximum group size up front. The maximum group size should be fixed depending on the kind of mountains. We can divide them into two categories:
 - Trekking Peaks & Mountaineering Expeditions
 - Trekking

9. SAFETY BRIEFING

The lead guide/expedition leader must give a proper briefing to expedition members before starting from the base camp and this should include:

1. Exact route, campsites, and places where ropes have been fixed. Hazards on the mountain and expected weather.
2. The protocol to be followed during the climb. Details on SOPs to be followed.
3. Role of the expedition lead guide and assistant guide.

4. Procedures to be followed in an emergency.

10. BASIC MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR GRANT OF RECOGNITION TO OPERATORS

It is highly recommended that any outfit, entity, establishment, or company seeking a grant of recognition must fulfill these desirable criteria:

1. The entity must own specialized equipment commensurate with the needs of undertaking and running such an operation.
2. The entity must have qualified personnel on its payroll. This person must have the requisite experience in the activity and have valid First Aid & CPR certifications.
3. The entity must operate with the required permits/licenses.
4. It is recommended that the entity is registered with the State/UT Tourism Department / recognized by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.
5. The entity must have a registered office.
6. The mountaineering company must follow a strict 'leave no trace policy and conform to high sustainability standards.

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ANNEXURE 2 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK FOR THE UNION TERRITORY OF LADAKH

1. CONSTITUTION OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh shall, by notification/ order will constitute a 'Technical Committee' for Mountaineering with the following members:

Composition of the Technical Committee	
Director (Tourism), UT Ladakh	Chairperson
Chief Wildlife Warden / Representative, Wildlife Department	Member
Principal ISM, Kargil Branch	Member
Principal FCI/ IHM, Leh	Member
Representative of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF)	Member
Representative of the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) for Mountaineering	Member
Representative of the Ladakh Association for Mountaineering	Member
Assistant Director (Tourism), Concerned	Convening Member

2. FUNCTIONS OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

The Technical Committee shall meet once every year before the start of the tourist season in the Union Territory of Ladakh, and shall be responsible for the following:

- Inspect and certify the equipment with the operator from a safety point of view.
- Scrutinize the credential of the personnel responsible for conducting Mountaineering, the medical fitness of the guide, and conduct their physical test to ascertain their expertise.
- Ensure that the operator and the guide shall follow all safety procedures indicated in their rules.
- Identify new areas/ routes/ tracks for Mountaineering in the Union Territory of Ladakh.
- Notify the exact stretches on the identified areas/ routes/ tracks where the operation can be safely conducted, considering the area's environmental sensitivity, critical wildlife hotspots and fragile water systems.
- Formulate a plan for containing the environmental impact strictly inside the designated activity area.
- Forecast the potential ecological impacts and ensure a plan for eco-conditioning to minimize the impact and offsetting the potential environmental impact.
- Ensure preparation and implementation of a Risk Management Matrix, and Emergency & Evacuation plan.
- Ensure preparation of a plan for tourist awareness and education.
- Determine the capacity of each track every year before the start of any operation.

3. CONSTITUTION OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEE

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh shall, by notification/ order will constitute a 'Regulatory Committee' for Mountaineering with the following members:

Composition of the Regulatory Committee	
Assistant Director (Tourism), Concerned	Chairperson
Wildlife Warden or Representative, Wildlife Department	Member
Representative of the District Disaster Response Force (DDRF)	Member
Representative of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO)	Member
SHO/Choki of the Concerned Area	Member
Representative of the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) for Mountaineering	Member
Representative of the Ladakh Association for Mountaineering	Member
Officer in-charge of the Department of Tourism, UT Ladakh at Sub-Division and Tehsils	Convening Member

4. FUNCTIONS OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEE

The Regulatory Committee shall meet once every year before the start of the tourist season in the Union Territory of Ladakh, and shall be responsible for the following:

- Overall control for regulating the Mountaineering operations, in coordination with the concerned stakeholders and associations.
- Surprise inspections during the Mountaineering operations to ascertain adherence of the guidelines, assess the quality & condition of equipment being used and assess the ecological impact, to help develop adaptive management strategies. The Regulatory Committee shall constitute a joint inspection or verification team with the Department of Youth Services & Sports, UT Ladakh and Adventure Sports Association, if any.

- Establish a mechanism for receiving and addressing complaints, concerns, and feedback from local communities, tourists, and stakeholders.
- Any other functions concerning Mountaineering operations in the Union Territory of Ladakh.

5. CLAIM ON ACCOUNT OF ANY MISHAP

The Department of Tourism, or any other Department/ Authority of the Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh shall, in no way be responsible for any claims on account of any mishap.

6. SHOW CAUSE NOTICE

If any operator, guide, or personnel responsible for conducting Mountaineering operations is found to be violating these Guidelines & Regulations for Mountaineering, appropriate action shall be taken by the Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh.

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