**$4.6m plan to save butterflies**

Published November 27, 2007

CERRO PRIETO (Mexico): Mexico announced a plan on Sunday to pump pesos into a monarch butterfly reserve to boost tourism and create jobs in an impoverished area where illegal logging threatens the monarch’s habitat.

The $4.6 million plan will buy equipment and advertising for the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve, a 124,000-acre wooded park in Mexico’s Michoacan state, where clouds of orange-and-black-winged butterflies nest each winter after flying south from Canada and the US.

“It is possible to take care of the environment and at the same time promote development,” President Felipe Calderon said on Sunday in a ceremony to celebrate the monarchs’ arrival.

Calderon’s administration has boosted efforts to protect the environment, promoting plans to combat global warming and plant 250 million trees across the country this year. But in a developing country plagued by pollution and spotty regulation, progress is slow.

Monarch butterflies have become an ecological symbol most Mexicans can rally around — they adorn license plates in Michoacan, Calderon’s native state. Police even stand guard along some highways there, slowing cars that might hit the butterflies as they fly in swarms across the road.

Omar Vidal, director of the World Wildlife Fund’s Mexico programme, applauded Calderon’s plan.“This is the longest migration of all insects, a unique phenomenon and a natural wonder and Mexico has the biggest responsibility to protect them because they come here to hibernate,” he said.

The butterfly reserve, which in addition to the funds announced on Sunday receives $36.4 million in government funding a year, is patrolled by park rangers who roam the area armed with assault rifles, searching for armed gangs of illegal loggers.

Unauthorised logging threatens to the monarch’s habitat, which requires leafy foliage to protect the insects from rain and cold.

The monarch butterfly’s disappearing habitat threatens a delicate migratory route that has spanned two continents and a million square miles for some 10,000 years.

Each September, the butterflies begin a 3,400 mile journey from the forests of eastern Canada and parts of the US to the central Mexican mountains. The voyage is considered an aesthetic and scientific wonder.

They return north in late March, where they breed and cycle through as many as five generations before heading south again the next year. Scientists say the monarchs are genetically programmed to return to Mexico, where they settle in the same mountains their ancestors inhabited the year before. Sometimes, they return to the very same trees — probably because previous monarchs have marked the area in ways scientists don’t yet understand, Brower said.

Progress has been made protecting the butterflies’ home in Mexico, where they’ve become a tourist attraction and source of pride.—AP