

Gangtok, May 4: (IPR) The “International Conference on Biodiversity and SDGs: Sustainable Livelihood and Protecting the Planet” organised by the Forest Environment & Wildlife Management Department, Government of Sikkim, at Chintan Bhawan, Gangtok was formally inaugurated by Chief Minister Shri. Pawan Chamling today. Accompanying him on the dais were Shri Somnath Poudyal, Minister (Agriculture), Shri. Tshering Wangdi Lepcha, Minister (Forest), Dr. Vandana Shiva, renowned environmentalist, author, professional speaker and social activist, Mr. Bernward Geier, Founder, COLABORA Germany and Member of the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists -IFAJ, and Mr. Andre Leu, International Director, Regeneration International and Ambassador IFOAM - Organics International.

The Conference had the distinguished presence and participation of national and international luminaries from the field of Biodiversity conservation and Sustainable Development Goals.

“The Himalayas have been our life givers in terms of giving water resources to the people living not only in the Himalayan region but also in the plains which act as the granary of the entire country” said the Chief Minister in his address while touching on the subject of Biodiversity and how fragile the environment has become in the recent years due constant human activities. He said that in the area of Biodiversity Management, increasing the green cover has been the state’s greatest effort which incidentally conferred on Sikkim as the greenest state in 1998 and as the first organic state in the country in 2016 which is an achievement to be proud of.

While reflecting back to the past he stated that “Twenty three years ago when we took over the reign of governance, we took upon ourselves the task of defining both short-term and long term sustainable development programs for our State. We started to take bold initiatives in wide ranging sectors like education, health, social justice, environment, poverty alleviation etc. I realize there are many commonalities between our initiatives and the Sustainable Development Goals set-up by the United Nations for 2015-2030”. In his address he also touched upon the various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which Sikkim has been able to follow. He specifically targeted that the SDG agenda 14 and 15 reflected the importance of biodiversity and ecosystems. He then briefly touched upon some of the Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030, specifically related to the initiatives undertaken in Sikkim so far relating to ending Poverty in all its forms, to End Hunger, health initiatives through Chief Minister’s Comprehensive Annual and Total Check-Up for Healthy Sikkim (CATCH) programs, equitable quality education and life-long learning opportunities for all and ultimate goal of making Sikkim as the 100 % literate state by the end of 2018, gender equality and other goals etched down by the UN. He expressed his gratitude towards the initiative take by them in organizing these global initiatives with this international

conference on 'Biodiversity and SDGs-sustainable livelihood and protecting the planet'.

While addressing the inaugural session, Dr. Vandana Shiva applauded the State of Sikkim and HCMs initiatives for leading the state towards sustainable development for the past 25 years. She also congratulated HCM for being the longest serving Chief Minister in India. In her address she stated that the Sikkimese populous are privileged to live in Sikkim when the whole world is filled with woes of its own. She also applauded Sikkim for leading their role in organic farming amongst the Himalayan states and also helping them in their vision of making the entire Himalayan Region Organic by 2022.

During the program, a book titled "Rapid Biodiversity Survey Vol. 3&4" was released by the Chief Minister and other dignitaries present in the dais.

Earlier, Dr. Thomas Chandy, IFS, Pr. Secy-cum-PCCF (FE&WM) in his welcome address said that the world is at a critical juncture and that it is a concern of all to be vigilant towards the environment and its pattern of behaviour. He also said that each year over One Hundred Thousand sq. Kms. of Biodiversity is lost which is alarming and needs actions. He also said that 'Sustainable Development is the only Model that can help the world' which the state of Sikkim has been doing for the past years. He said that under the visionary leadership of the HCM the state has been plastic free since 2 decades and that the protected areas have increased from 13.5% to 30.77%. Moreover, he said that Sikkim is an example which needs and can be replicated in the other part of North-East states of India.

The one-day Conference was divided into five technical sessions with specific themes. Among the national and international delegates who facilitated these sessions were Dr. Vandana Shiva, Founder Navdanya, Mr Bernward Geier, Founder COLABORA, Mr. Andre Leu, International Director IFOAM, Dr. Saamdu Chettri, Former Executive Director, Gross National Happiness Centre, Bhutan and visiting faculty IIT Kharagpur, Dr. Mira Shiva, Coordinator IHES and Founder Member of Doctors for food Safety, Ms Maya Goburdhun, Director Navdanya, Ms Neha Raj Singh, Project coordinator Navdanya, Mr Vaidya G.G. Gangadharan, Ramaiah Indic Speciality Ayurveda, Bangalore, Dr. Vinod Bhatt, Project Director, Navdanya, Dr. Biju Kumar, Dean, Department of Aquatic Biology & Fisheries, University of Kerala, Dr. H.K. Badola, Freelance expert, Biodiversity Conservation, Bio culture and Climate Change, and Ms Neha Upadhyaya, Founder, GUNA and Macrobiotic coach.

The one day conference hosted in the capital was attended by Cabinet Ministers, senior officers of the Government of Sikkim, dignitaries from India and abroad, researchers and scientists, and students.

