

Gangtok, March 9: (IPR) The National Seminar on 'Understanding Himalayan Phytodiversity in Changing Climate' organized by Botanical Survey of India, Sikkim Himalayan Region Centre in collaboration with East Himalayan Society for Spermatophyte Taxonomy and Sikkim University was held today at Chintan Bhawan. The Chief Guest for the function was the Hon'ble Chief Minister Mr. Pawan Chamling and the Guest of Honour was the Minister for Forest Env & Wildlife Mr. Tshering Wangdi Lepcha.

The Chief Minister Mr. Pawan Chamling at the outset of the programme thanked all the esteemed guests for being part of such an august gathering and for the exchange of their views and opinions which would help in the restoration of the ecological balance. He talked about the significance of the Himalayan belt and how it affects the biodiversity of the region. 'The Himalayan region is today facing unprecedented pressure and these threats are accelerated by global climate change, therefore it is crucial that sustainable, effective development and conservation measures are formed and implemented', he stressed. He said that nature has been particularly generous in her gift of sylvan treasures to the state of Sikkim and the state accounts for 26% of the country's total biodiversity. Thus the state of Sikkim has been primarily concerned with the conservation and protection of Forests and other natural resources in the state.

The Chief Minister addressed the audience and talked about how the state government has put in place various measures for environment protection such as ban on grazing of cattle and green felling in reserved forest areas, prohibition on manufacture, use and sale of firecrackers, prohibition on use of plastic carry bags and prohibition on burning of agricultural wastes. To complement these conservation steps, initiatives such as Ten Minutes to Earth, State Green Mission, Paryavaran Mahotsav, environment education in all government schools along with green awards for schools so that the students inculcate environment-friendly activities in their day to day lives are also implemented in the state. He also talked about Sikkim being the first Organic state and he requested all the other states of the country to follow suit. At the end he thanked all the revered guests and eminent scientists present and hoped that the deliberations emerging from this two days seminar would provide useful inputs in evolving effective strategies to meet the challenges of global climate change.

Minister for Forest Environment and Wildlife Management Department talked about the biodiversity of Sikkim and how identification and understanding of key ecological and socio-economic parameters are crucial for effective conservation measures. He said that Sikkim covers just 0.2% of the geological area of the country yet the state is endowed with rich floral diversity and lakes and forests. Thus many communities in the Sikkim Himalayan region are directly dependent on the biodiversity of their surroundings for livestock grazing and collection of medicinal, aromatic and edible plants. He hoped that this national

seminar would find solutions for climate change and the state government would work in tandem with the findings of the policies.

Botanical Survey of India, Director Dr. Paramjit Singh gave the welcome address where he expressed his gratefulness towards the Hon'ble Chief Minister for extending all help possible. He said that 80% of the survey in the state has been completed and that Sikkim has progressed tremendously, the state has lot of potential due to its unique features and it can be a frontrunner in orchids he stressed. Dr. Lalit Kapoor, Advisor MoEF & CC, New Delhi also gave a brief study on the biodiversity of Sikkim and the Indian Himalayan region. He talked about conservation strategies and how it can be implemented to meet the challenges of global climate change. The vote of thanks was delivered by the Organizing Secretary, Mr. Dinesh Agarwal.