



Date:26/01/2010 URL: <http://www.thehindu.com/2010/01/26/stories/2010012660550700.htm>

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Experts to discuss Western Ghats conservation

Special Correspondent

BANGALORE: The Western Ghats Task Force and the Department of Forests and Environment will organise a two-day scientists' conference on conservation of Western Ghats in Karnataka, here from January 28, and Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa will inaugurate it.

Speaking to presspersons here on Monday, the task force chairman Ananth Hegde Ashisar and Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests K. Sundar Naik said over 150 scientists from universities and institutions such as the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, environmentalists, officers, and NGOs engaged in forest conservation and wildlife protection would participate in the conference.

Keshava H. Korse, biologist, is the convener.

Mr. Ashisar said the conference would prepare a comprehensive policy and strategy for protecting the biodiversity of the Western Ghats and the State Government would be urged to implement it. D.K. Subrahmanyam and H. Ravindranath, senior scientists at IISc; Ullas Karanth, environmentalist; K.N. Ganeshiah of the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore; M.K. Ramesh of the NSLIU, Bangalore; and experts from Fisheries College, Mangalore, would present papers.

The Government would also be urged to set up a research centre for western ghats and a conservation fund for the protection of the forests in the region, Mr. Ashisar said. He said UNESCO, which had recognised the unique biodiversity of the Western Ghats, was planning to declare it as a World Natural Heritage region.

He said a group of scientists from the task force visited Ambara Gudda in Kodachadri Hills in December and urged the Government to declare it as biodiversity hot spot, and ban mining there.

It also visited Kappatagudda in Gadag district, which was rich in medicinal plants.

The task force, Mr. Ashisar said, held a meeting on climate change and stressed the importance of spreading awareness among the people in the region. An action plan would be prepared to achieve the objective. Mr. Ashisar said a team which went to Siddharabetta in Tumkur district suggested preserving the ecology in the surroundings.

Asked about the mining in Bellary and Tumkur districts, which had destroyed forests and harmed the ecology, Mr. Ashisar said no mining had been permitted in new areas in the past one year.

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