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Joining forces to protect the Western Ghats

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Task force is involving forest-dwellers and farmers to protect biodiversity



Ananth Hegde Ashisar, Chairman of the Western Ghats Task Force, speaking at the inaugural function of a State-level workshop in Udupi on Monday.

Ananth Hegde Ashisar, chairman of the Western Ghats Task Force, said on Monday that the task force was drawing farmers, forest-dwellers and students to join it in its drive to protect biodiversity in the Western Ghats.

He was speaking after inaugurating the two-day State level workshop on 'Principles and techniques of Plant Taxonomy with special reference to Western Ghats and coastal region', organised by the MGM College, Department of Forests and the Western Ghats Task Force, here.

Mr. Ashisar said that the task force had started a special project to preserve 'devara kadu' (sacred groves) in the districts of Udupi, Dakshina Kannada, Uttara Kannada, Shimoga and Chikmagalur. This preservation scheme had been formulated based on the recommendation of experts.

The task force is popularising programmes related to conservation of Western Ghats at the hobli-level.

Its aim is to identify biodiversity rich spots and offer them community-based protection. The task force had identified 50 folk medicine doctors as village taxonomists and they are helping in identifying medicinal plants.

Forest fires

As there have been incidents of forest fires in the State, the task force is working on how to prevent them. During such fires, many medicinal plants are destroyed. The plant taxonomists would be able to identify those that get destroyed.

Since the task force is prioritising the conservation of medicinal plants, plant taxonomists would be able to advise them on which plants must be cultivated in the Medicinal Plant Conservation Areas promoted by the task force.

Preventing forest fires is not just the work of the Department of Forests alone. The district administrations too should take an active role in stemming them, Mr. Ashisar said.

He added that the deputy commissioners have the Natural Calamities Fund at their disposal, which can be put to

good use to prevent forest fires.

The task force has also taken up a project to protect pollution of rivers with the involvement of panchayat raj institutions. The use of insecticide endosulfan had affected nearly 250 persons near Bhatkal in Uttara Kannada district, Mr. Ashisar said.

A. Ganesh, Deputy Conservator of Forests, Kundapur division; Manjunath Shetty, Assistant Conservator of Forests; Prakash Netalkar, Deputy Conservator of Forests, Kudremukh Wildlife division; M.H. Swaminath, adviser to the Department of Forests; and P.V. Gowda, Principal of MGM College, were present.

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