

# Western Ghats throw up more surprises

By AMIT S UPADHYE

Bangalore, Dec 6: First the bad news. Endemic plant species in Western Ghats have been reduced to about 90 in number.

Now the good news. Out of 4,000-odd plant species in the Western Ghats, 80 per cent of them have been found to be economically important species.

Such little known facts about the Sahyadri's flora are being unveiled, thanks to a first-of-its-kind plant survey, covering the length and breadth of the Western Ghats spread across 1.40 lakh square kilometres. The ghats start from river Tapti in Gujarat and stretch to Kanyakumari, traversing six states of India.

## 60 experts embark on a plant survey of biodiversity hotspot

The plant survey project is being funded by the National Biodiversity Resource Development Board, an off-shoot of the Central Department of Biotechnology

Coordinator of plant survey project, Prof K N. Ganeshaiyah told the Express the five-year long survey which is still half-way through, has unravelled some hitherto unknown facts about the plant species of Western Ghats.

"An endemic plant known as 'Semicarpus Kathalékanis' is under greater threat due to increasing human pressure in the

highly sensitive area. Unfortunately, among 90 plants found, there were only 20 female plants which were located in different places, creating hurdles in the process of pollination," he said.

"The survey team comprises six principal investigators -- two in Maharashtra, three in Karnataka and one in Kerala -- under whom a six-member team is busy recording plant species.

The 3/3 grids measuring four kilometres each are being covered daily by the survey team," he added.

A major outcome of the ongoing survey seems to be the identification of plant species that are economically important. About 80 per cent of the plant population in the Western Ghats are economically important for their commercial and medicinal properties.

"The area covering Western Ghats in Uttara Kannada district and north Kerala is highly rich in rare plant population and needs preservation. The relocation of human settlements from the core areas of Western Ghats could be a solution, but the process is quite tedious," he added.

The plant survey is still on, and scientists are busy unearthing more facts of the 'biodiversity hotspot'.