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Information & Public Relations Department
Government of Odisha, Bhubaneswar-751001
Phone : (91-674) 2536736 /2390818 (Fax)
e-mail : iprsec.or@nic.in

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International Day for Biological Diversity

Sustainable and harmonious relationship with nature is essential to ensure a healthy planet

: Forest Minister Shri SingKhuntia

Bhubaneswar: 22/05/2025

Harmony with nature is essential to provide a better quality of life to the people of our state and we have to protect the most vital and rich biodiversity of the state. It is our duty to promote responsible use of natural resources including land, water, animals and forests and ensure their availability for future generations. In this regard, the curriculum needs to include various sustainable practices and educate students. By adopting these principles and adopting appropriate practices, we can create a more sustainable and harmonious relationship with nature, ensuring a healthy planet for all, said Forest Minister Shri SingKhuntia.

Today, while participating as the chief guest in the state-level International Day for Biological Diversity celebration organized by the State Biodiversity Board at Lok Seva Bhavan Convention Centre, Minister, Forest, Environment and Climate Change Shri Ganesh Ram SingKhuntia said that the main objective of this day is to conserve the vast biodiversity and use it sustainably. The theme of the International Day for Biological Diversity 2025 is "Harmony with Nature and its Sustainable Development". Biodiversity fulfills many needs of humans. Since the dawn of human civilization, humans have been dependent on valuable biodiversity and biological resources for food, shelter, clothing, energy, medicine and many other needs. Due to our diverse geographical splendor and climate from the Eastern Ghats to the Bay of Bengal, our state of Odisha is rich in unique and unparalleled biodiversity. Odisha is home to a diverse range of flora and fauna, with forests, agricultural lands, grasslands, wetlands, salt marshes, coastal areas, river valleys, sand dunes, dry lands, etc. Our state has notable features such as the largest brackish water lake Chilika and extensive dry rainforests. Odisha's biodiversity is an important part of India's vast biodiversity, which contributes significantly to the forest and ecological landscape of the country. The state has a total forest and tree cover of 57,160 sq km, which is 36.71% of the total geographical area. Forest, Environment and Climate Change dept. has implemented several programmes to maintain environmental stability by mitigating the effects of climate change as much as possible, thereby preventing serious decline in forests. Forests are naturally important ecological areas where various types of wildlife live; the dept has taken several steps to manage them properly. In compliance with the provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Biodiversity Act 2002 and the Biodiversity Rules 2004 have been implemented in India and the Act has been amended in 2023. The State Biodiversity Board was constituted in 2009 to advise the State Government on matters related to the objectives of the Act. Within three years, in 2012, the Board formulated the Odisha Biodiversity Rules and has been implementing various measures in all parts of the State. The main objective of the Odisha Biodiversity Rules is to involve the general public at various levels for the conservation of biodiversity. The rules include making the people of all the Gram Panchayats of the State aware of the biodiversity available in their surrounding environment and making proper use of it. The State Biodiversity Board has already constituted 7256 Biodiversity Management Committees. The Board is actively involved in spreading awareness among all stakeholders. Minister Shri SingKhuntia also expressed that the Board has been playing a leading role in documenting the rich biodiversity and biological resources of the state through preparation of public biodiversity inventory and research in various biodiversity hotspots of the state.

Shri Satyabrata Sahu, Additional Chief Secretary, Forest, Environment and Climate Change, graced the occasion as the Guest of Honour and said that our state is famous for its rich and unique biodiversity. This includes a wide variety of flora and fauna, including many endangered and threatened species. Odisha supports a wide range of diverse geographical habitats and ecosystems, including coastal areas, forests and wetlands. The major aspects of Odisha's biodiversity are flora, fauna, endangered species, protected areas, conservation efforts, agricultural biodiversity, biodiversity heritage sites and endemic species. The state has over 5174 plant and fungal species, including 2800 higher plant species, various grasses, orchids,

pteridophytes, gymnosperms, mangroves, marine algae, sea grasses and carnivorous plants. Odisha is home to a diverse range of fauna, including 19 species of amphibians, 110 species of reptiles (including frogs), 473 species of birds and 86 species of mammals. Our state is an important habitat for endangered species such as the Olive Ridley turtle (Gahirmatha Beach), the Irrawaddy dolphin (Chilika Lake), and various other animal and plant species. The state has established several protected areas, including wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, biosphere reserves and tiger reserves, to conserve its biodiversity. Local communities and government agencies are actively involved in protecting and conserving Odisha's natural resources. Odisha also recognizes the importance of agricultural biodiversity, which includes the diversity and variability of plants, animals and microorganisms essential for food production and security. Four Biodiversity Heritage Sites (BHS) have been declared in Odisha: Mandasaru Hills, Mahendragiri Hills, Gandhamardan Hills and Gupteshwar Forest. These sites are recognized for their unique biodiversity and cultural significance. Similipal National Park, Chilika Lake, Bhitarkanika National Park, Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary and Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary are also considered biodiversity hotspots in Odisha. A significant portion of Odisha's fauna and flora includes endemic species, meaning they are found nowhere else in the world. ACS Shri Sahu advised the Board to take steps for sustainable use of the vast natural resources of the State, restoration of lost and depleting biodiversity and inculcating the concept of biodiversity conservation among the youth of the State.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief of Forest Service, Shri Suresh Pant, as the guest of honour highlighted the role of BMCs in achieving the three objectives of the Act. Realizing that creating a biodiversity conservation mindset among the youth would be very fruitful for achieving the long-term goals, he appreciated the efforts of the Board in involving the youth of various schools and universities in the programme.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) and Chief Wildlife Warden Shri Prem Kumar Jha, as the guest of honour said that the efforts of the Board in creating awareness on biodiversity among the people at the grassroots level are commendable.

At the outset, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chairman, Odisha Biodiversity Board, Dr. Mita Biswal, in her welcome address, briefed the audience about the programme and highlighted the Board's continuous efforts towards achieving all mandatory activities under the Odisha Biodiversity Act 2002 (Amendment 2023) and the Board's success in conserving the valuable biodiversity of Odisha over the past years.

The guests started the programme by offering water to six of the most endangered plants of Odisha. The Chief Guest and other guests released four books published by the Board for various stakeholders namely 1. Freshwater Turtles and Echoes from Sacred Sites of Odisha", 2. "Common Aquatic Plants of Odisha: A Pocket Field Guide", 3. "A Bilingual Operational Guide for Biodiversity Management Committees" and 4. Activity Report of Odisha Biodiversity Board: 2024-25. The Board had earlier organized a Debate Competition among Postgraduate Students of Universities of Odisha. A Drawing Competition was also organized for School Students near to Ramsar Sites of Odisha. The guests distributed prizes to the winners of the competition at the event.

In the Technical Session, three eminent speakers and biodiversity experts were invited. Former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests Dr. Ajit Kumar Patnaik delivered a speech on "From Ecosystem to Economy: Biodiversity as a Basis for Ecosystem Stability, Climate Adaptation, Livelihoods and Sustainable Development". Sushil K. Dutta, former Professor of Zoology, MSCB University, Baripada, delivered a speech on "Water, Land, Forest, Animals and Life". Dr. Manoj V. Nair, Director, Nandankanan Biological Garden, delivered a speech on "Citizen Science Awareness: How Each of Us Can Contribute to Conservation". The programme concluded with the vote of thanks by Dr. Nihar Ranjan Nayak, Member Secretary, Odisha Biodiversity Board.

The state-level event was attended by current and retired officers of the Forest, Environment and Climate Change Department, Biodiversity Management Committee (BMC) members from all 30 districts of the state, university and school students along with their selected teachers and professors, traditional knowledge holders and practitioners and various other stakeholders.

