



# REPORT ON THE CELEBRATION OF INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY, 2024 BY THE WEST BENGAL BIODIVERSITY BOARD

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Date & Time: 22<sup>th</sup> May 2024, 10:30 a.m. Place: Science City Seminar Hall, Kolkata

*:: Theme of the Year ::*  
**"Be part of the Plan"**

The International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB) observed on 22<sup>th</sup> May each year, marks a global celebration dedicated to raising awareness about the paramount importance of biodiversity and encouraging actions to protect and sustain it.

The theme for this year, **"Be part of the Plan"** emphasizes collective efforts to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by supporting the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. In alignment with the global theme, the West Bengal Biodiversity Board has organized a state-level day long program at Science City Seminar Hall, Kolkata on 22<sup>th</sup> May, 2024. About 120 people from different fields including Govt. organisation, Research institutes, BMCs, NGOs, University and College students took part in the celebration.

**Dignitaries on the Dais:** Smt. Roshni Sen (IAS), Additional Chief Secretary, Department of Environment. GoWB  
Dr. Himadri Sekhar Debnath, Chairman, West Bengal Biodiversity Board  
Dr. Kalyan Rudra, Chairman, West Bengal Pollution Control Board  
Dr. Rajesh Kumar (IPS), Member Secretary West Bengal Pollution Control Board  
Smt. Tripti Sah (IFS), Member Secretary, West Bengal Biodiversity Board

The program was inaugurated by welcoming the guests on dais and honouring them with an Uttariya and planting of sapling.

**Dr. Himadri Sekhar Debnath**, Chairman, West Bengal Biodiversity Board, started the opening remarks by warmly welcoming all the participants and dignitaries on the dais. He then drew attention to the ongoing degradation of four critical components of Earth's ecosystem: water, soil, light, and air. He emphasized the urgent need to address these issues to ensure the health and sustainability of our environment. Dr. Debnath noted that while India is recognized as a megadiverse country, West Bengal holds a unique position to its geographical location. Being situated between the Himalayas in the north and the Bay of Bengal in the south, the state boasts a rich and varied ecosystem. However, human activities have caused a significant loss of biodiversity in West Bengal, threatening the delicate balance of the state's ecosystem and affecting both flora and fauna.

To combat these challenges and safeguard West Bengal's unique biodiversity, Dr. Debnath called for a comprehensive plan. He emphasized that the success of this plan hinges on the active participation of all sections of society.



Dr. Debnath highlighted this year's theme for International Biodiversity Day, set by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The theme, "Be part of the Plan," highlights the global need for collaborative efforts in protecting biodiversity. He urged everyone present to embrace this theme and contribute to the collective mission of conserving our natural heritage.

Dr. Debnath informed the audience about the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), adopted during the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP15) in 2022. This framework envisions a world living in harmony with nature by 2050 and includes 23 targets to be achieved by 2030. He called for collective efforts from all segments of society to implement these targets and restore our planet.

Concluding his remarks, Dr. Debnath quoted an ancient chant from the Rigveda, expressing a harmonious relationship with nature: *"May the winds blow sweetly, May the rivers flow sweetly, May plants and herbs be sweet to us, May night and morning be sweet to us,...."*

**Smt. Roshni Sen (IAS)**, Additional Chief Secretary of the Department of Environment, Government of West Bengal, began her address by expressing concern about the impact of human activities on biodiversity. She emphasized that while efforts to reshape ecosystems can have positive intentions, they often lead to unintended biodiversity loss. To illustrate this point, she referenced the lake 'Jorpokhari' in Darjeeling district. Known as a breeding ground for the Himalayan Salamander, the lake's habitat was inadvertently destroyed when the local authority concretized its banks in the name of beautification.



In response to this issue, Smt. Sen informed the audience that the West Bengal Biodiversity Board has designated another lake in the region, Namthing Pokhari, as a Biodiversity Heritage Site (BHS) to protect the habitat of the Himalayan Salamander. She proudly noted that West Bengal leads the nation with ten declared Biodiversity Heritage Sites, the highest number by any state in India, with more sites in the pipeline.

To further support biodiversity conservation, she informed that the Board has introduced the concept of 'Avoy Pukur' to protect indigenous fish species. This initiative reflects the Board's commitment to conserving local biodiversity through innovative and localized strategies.

Smt. Sen further highlighted several other conservation initiatives such as the creation of Biodiversity Parks in various blocks to foster local flora and fauna and establishing Butterfly Conservation Areas in schools to educate and involve students in conservation efforts.

She concluded her address by seeking the cooperation of various government departments and stakeholders to aid in these conservation efforts and ensure the conservation of West Bengal's unique biodiversity.



**Dr. Kalyan Rudra**, Chairman, West Bengal Pollution Control Board, in his address emphasized the limited nature of Earth's resources and the detrimental effects of their overuse. He highlighted that we are living in the Anthropocene era, a period characterized by significant human impact on the planet. Dr. Rudra warned that, in the name of development, we have been consuming planetary resources at unsustainable rates. He noted the pervasive issue of microplastic contamination, which affects everything from the water we drink to the food we consume. He pointed out

that this being one of the major negative cause has severe implications, including compromised food

production and the extinction of various species. The presence of microplastics in our environment is a stark indicator of the broader issue of pollution and its far-reaching consequences.

To address these environmental challenges, Dr. Rudra advocated for the "Mission Life" initiative, which stands for 'Lifestyle for Environment.' This mission aims to promote sustainable living practices for the betterment of society and the conservation of biodiversity and the environment. By adopting more sustainable lifestyles, individuals can contribute to a larger, collective effort to reduce environmental impact and ensure a healthier planet for future generations.

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Rudra emphasized that the issues and concerns regarding biodiversity need to be addressed by everyone throughout the year, not only during celebrations of International Day for Biological Diversity. He stressed the importance of continuous effort and awareness to effectively tackle the challenges facing our environment and biodiversity.



**Dr. Rajesh Kumar (IPS)**, Member Secretary of the West Bengal Pollution Control Board, commenced his lecture by emphasizing that Earth's resources are meant for all species, not just humans. He pointed out that while all species contribute to sustaining these resources, humans have disproportionately exploited them. Dr. Kumar cautioned that Mother Nature is a great experimenter, capable of driving species, including humans, to extinction through her natural processes.

He cited the COVID-19 pandemic as a poignant example of nature's power to disrupt human activities. The virus outbreak effectively halted human civilization for nearly two years, highlighting the vulnerability of our species. In light of these challenges, Dr. Kumar encouraged everyone to participate in the "Mission Life" program.

Dr. Kumar concluded by highlighting the critical need for humans to rethink their relationship with the natural world, emphasizing collective responsibility and action to safeguard the planet for all species.

### Technical Session

**Dr. M. Padmavati**, Professor at the Rajiv Gandhi School of Intellectual Property Law, IIT Kharagpur, delivered her technical lecture, focusing on biodiversity conservation laws and their critical role in conserving our planet. She began by discussing the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), highlighting India's commitment to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Dr. Padmavati emphasized that biodiversity loss can be halted and reversed through collective efforts involving all members of the society, from university professors and students to household workers.



Drawing from her research and experience, Dr. Padmavati shared insights into the importance of local indigenous communities in biodiversity conservation. These communities, living closely with nature, possess invaluable knowledge about biodiversity. She stressed that incorporating this indigenous knowledge can greatly enhance our conservation efforts.

Moreover, Dr. Padmavati stressed the need for more effective biodiversity legislation. She pointed out that integrating the traditional wisdom of indigenous peoples into legal frameworks can enrich conservation strategies and ensure more comprehensive protection of biodiversity.



Dr. Padmavati in her concluding remarks highlighted the importance of collaborative and informed efforts in biodiversity conservation. By leveraging the knowledge and expertise of various stakeholders, including indigenous communities, society can achieve significant progress in safeguarding our natural heritage.

**Dr. K. Venkataraman**, Former Director, Zoological Survey of India, & Former Secretary, National Biodiversity Authority, during his technical lecture showcased India's incredible biodiversity while lamenting its rapid loss. From the tiniest ant to the majestic elephant, from algae to flowering plants, he painted a vivid picture of the wealth of life that India harbours.

Beyond this, Dr. Venkataraman highlighted that diversity extends beyond human communities covering the numerous species of plants and animals that call the country home. He informed the audience about the invaluable agricultural heritage handed down through generations, expressing dismay at how these traditional varieties are being lost and destroyed, often due to influences from Western countries.

In his call to action, Dr. Venkataraman urged the younger generation to step up and engage in biodiversity conservation efforts. He stressed upon the importance of shifting lifestyles towards sustainability to ensure a healthy future for the country.



#### **Vote of thanks:**

Smt. Tripti Sah (IFS), Member Secretary, West Bengal Biodiversity Board proposed formal vote of thanks. She acknowledged the illuminating talk of the distinguished guests and expressed the gratefulness of the Board for their valuable time. She extended thanks to the National Biodiversity Authority, Department of Environment, Govt. of WB, and all the participants for making the event successful.

