

Conference on Himalayan Environment: Issues & Challenges

A three-day-long conference on Himalayan Environment: Issues and Challenges, was organized by the Institute of Integrated Himalayan Studies (IIHS), Himachal Pradesh University and Mountain Forum Himalayan from 22-24th March, 2010. The conference intended to provide a platform to environmentalists, climatologists, mountain ecologists, hill development experts, scholars, scientists, natural resource specialists, designers, planners and all other interested in the Himalayan ecosystems and their conservation. The conference discussed different technical, physical, ecological, biological, political, sociological and economic dimensions of environment in the region. It was organized with an objective to point out various eco-threats to the environment in the Himalayan region in general and Himachal Pradesh in particular. They discussed the need to evolve a few remedial measures to save the vanishing Himalayan Mountains and the remarkable potentials of their natural resources.

At the onset, Prof. S. P. Bansal honored the Guests and gave a brief introduction of the Institute. Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Sunil Kumar Gupta, H. P. University, Shimla, delivered the welcome address. On this occasion, Chief Minister, Prof. Prem Kumar Dhumal released Institute's News Letter, Souvenir and Books. A small panel discussion followed the inaugural session and the main panelists were Dr. Vandana Shiva, Eminent Environmentalist and Alternate Noble Prize Winner; Prof. R. D. Gaur, Professor Emeritus, Department of Botany, HNB, Garwal University; Dr. D. Chaudhary, ICIMOD, Nepal; Prof. S. P. Bhardwaj, Vice-Chancellor, *Manav Bharati* University, Solan; Prof. T. N. Lakhanpal, Professor Emeritus, Department of Bio-sciences, H. P. University, Shimla; Prof. S. P. Bansal, Conference Director of the Institute. The conference consisted of Technical Sessions focusing at:

- Traditional Water Harvesting Systems in Mountains: Issues and Challenges
- Himalayan Bio-Resources and Natural Resources
- Disaster Management
- Tourism & Environment
- People Participation

Chief Minister, Prof. Prem Kumar Dhumal, inaugurated the conference at Hotel Peter Hoff, Shimla and stressed the need for creating public consciousness to conserve environment and irrational use of valuable natural resources of Himalayan region. The Chief Minister held fast growing population and its dependence on forest responsible for deforestation, soil erosion, thereby endangering environment and threatening ecosystem. He said continuous loss of biodiversity and forest cutting is a cause of concern and corrective measures must be taken to protect the fragile ecology of the region. He mentioned the efforts of the state government in the launch of different afforestation schemes, including '*Pipal-Bargad*' and rejuvenation of deodar trees. He further said that people's participation was must to make sure success of any programme and people must be encouraged to accept age old traditions so as to lead the community on a path of ecologically sustainable development.

Delivering the keynote address, eminent environmentalist, Dr. Vandana Shiva said Himachal must take lessons from Uttarakhand in promoting organic farming. "The NAVDANAYA movement in Uttarakhand has shown way to farmers in switching over to organic farming which can be adopted as a Model in Himachal," she said. She held her organization had fought for protection of over 11,000 plant species against piracy under the Intellectual Property Rights Act. She also stressed for conserving indigenous varieties of seeds, which could be used by communities for undertaking organic farming.

The conference called for an urgent need for collecting information on monitoring of climatic parameters, physical and biological conditions, socio-cultural and livelihoods situations in the Himalaya for generating consistent representative data. This could be used for planning appropriate strategy for future action. There is a lack of scientific information and long term research on climatic pattern. Its impact on

biodiversity and livelihoods of the people living in the region requires to be analyzed. A concerted and coordinated effort would be required to deal with various aspects of climate change studies so that there is no duplication of efforts and researched information flows back to the society and policy planners speedily. It has brought out a conference compendium for all those who are linked with the environment