

## **International Biodiversity conference 2012 Started on 1st October 2012 in Hyderabad International Convention Centre**

**హైదరాబాద్ ఇంటర్నేషనల్ కన్వెన్షన్ సెంటర్ లో ప్రారంభమైన అంతర్జాతీయ జీవవైవిధ్యం సదస్సు**

The much-awaited global biodiversity meet in the city was declared open on Monday by Jayanthi Natarajan, the Union minister of environment and forests. Over 1,000 delegates from across the globe have trooped in to be part of the first segment of the meet, Meeting of Parties (MoP 6), where participants will deliberate and take forward the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, which was adopted by members of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in January, 2000. The five-day meet will be followed by the Conference of Parties (CoP -11), which begins October 8.

According to MoEF officials, close to 12,000 delegates have so far registered for the 19-day event. More than 300 side events have been planned that will run alongside the convention, to be conducted by ministries, government-funded groups and civil society organizations from among the delegates.

A special science express biodiversity special train that was flagged off from New Delhi on June 5 will also be reaching Secunderabad on October 9 and will be stationed there till the end of the summit, said MF Farooqui, special secretary, MoEF, India.

Speaking at the inauguration, Natarajan said that India had already agreed to the Cartagena Protocol and was in the process of ratifying it. The protocol, which led to the creation of the Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress in 2010, deals with the identification, safe handling and transfer of living modified organisms (LMOs) and its benefits in acquiring food security in the long run. India is committed to the development of biotechnology. But while LMOs are important for future growth, it is also controversial. Trade in LMOs cannot be done without looking at the adverse impact of such organisms, she said.

Natarajan said that investment in biotechnology has seen a consistent rise in the Asia-Pacific region. To allow more progress, the MoEF minister, as the new president of the convention (by virtue of being the host country), urged more member countries to work together to strengthen bio-safety measures the world over. She also stressed on the need for more cooperation and knowledge-sharing

among member countries of the CBD to allow better management of LMOs.

There are also several socio-economic concerns, pertaining to indigenous and local communities, which need to be discussed. Our intention, over the next few days, is to look into these aspects and see if we can urge more member countries to sign in to the protocol, said Braulio Ferreira de Souza Diaz, executive secretary to CBD. Briefing participants, Diaz said that the event would deal with access and benefit sharing of biodiversity among member countries. While India is one of the first few countries to have agreed to this move, there has been much criticism of how it has been ignoring those local communities which have preserved its biodiversity for centuries.

Union minister of environment and forests, Jayanthi Natarajan, along with other delegates on Day I of CoP-11, at HICC, on 1st October 2012

GET, SET, GO: Delegates at the inauguration of the CoP-11 meet at HICC on 1st October 2012

### **CoP-11 special focus on GM crops**

#### **BV Shiva Shankar TNN**

India's concerns on genetically modified crops with a special mention to the debatable Bt cotton was given prime attention at the inaugural session of the biodiversity conference, the sixth Meeting of Parties (MoP-6) to the Cartagena Protocol on Bio-safety held in Hyderabad on Monday with the focus being on living modified organisms (LMOs). The experts felt that creating awareness at the government level on risk assessment and management with a view to curbing misinformation was important.

While tackling questions in a side event titled Key Issues For Advancing Bio-safety in Hyderabad, the panelists had to struggle a bit to convince the audience on an approach to push the government for decision making on promoting genetically modified crop such as Bt cotton.

In a country like India, it is easy for the government to ban genetically modified crop like Bt cotton, but it is hard to convey the benefits of the innovation. How to address this frustrating issue was the question from the audience following the presentations given by the experts.

Jack A Heinmann, professor at Centre for Integrated Research in Biosafety, University of Canterbury, said-, that the public awareness must be created considering the risk assessment angle and explained how Ad Hoc Technological Expert Group on Risk Assessment and Management (AHTEG) was established to address these issues.

The guidance on risk assessment of LMOs that is the outcome of AHTEG would come handy in creating awareness among both the government and the communities. The government must leverage on this to highlight the benefits. However, in a democratic set up various dynamics are in operation and it is difficult for decision making, he said.

Explaining the benefits of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), illustrating the soybean experiment in Bolivia, Georgia Catacova Vargas, member of Bolivian Development to the COP-MoP 6, said the use of genetically modified crops was beneficial for the farmers as well as the consumers as they yield more and are less toxic because of minimal use of pesticide. It is imperative that the government has the right information. The genetically modified crop like Bt Cotton is advantageous as the level of toxin expression in it can be very high thus delivering sufficient dosage to the pest. And as the usage of pesticide is less the health risk is minimal, she said.