

International Biodiversity conference 2012 Fourth Day on 3rd October 2012 in Hyderabad International Convention Centre

హైదరాబాద్ ఇంటర్నేషనల్ కన్వెన్షన్ సెంటర్ లో నాల్గవ రోజు అంతర్జాతీయ జీవవైవిధ్యం సదస్సు

The city is two-thirds of a point away from reaching the pinnacle of biodiversity conservation. On a scale of 92, the level of biodiversity management in Greater Hyderabad is 30. Topping the list in biodiversity management among cities in the world is Brussels with 55 points. For a historical and capital city like Greater Hyderabad, 30 points is neither bad nor good — it is a respectable score. Besides, Greater Hyderabad is the first city in the country to complete a basic, city-level biodiversity index.

“We have great scope for improving the score. Four more points will be given to us for formation of city biodiversity management committee, the process for which has been set in motion by GHMC. The city has a theme park with a ficus garden and is developing another theme park with native species. That will give us four more points,” said GHMC commissioner M.T. Krishna Babu. As the score has to be put to international scrutiny, the scoring in the biodiversity document has been awarded conservatively.

The GHMC has completed preparations for the formulation of a basic biodiversity index for the city. It will be compiled into a book and released at the Cities For Life Summit on October 15 and 16 during CoP-11. Most of the documentation is based on research work available with Osmania University. GHMC is the only corporation in the country to confirm its biodiversity index. About 14 cities from across the globe are also likely to present their biodiversity index and throw them open to international scrutiny during the summit. The scores may either go up or down then. Meanwhile, mayor Majid Hussain will host a dinner for the City Summit delegates on October 15 and 16.

India could be celebrating its role as the CoP-11 host and basking in glory for now holding the chair of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) for the next two years but environmentalists in the country find little to rejoice at this 'achievement' and say that they see no point in India even participating in the meet. Considering how the 'big daddies' of biotechnology are not party to CBD but are India's primary trade partners, experts feel that the deliberations at the global meet are unlikely to yield any fruitful results.

And not just the CBD, experts pointed out how other previous bio-safety agreements, too, have been conveniently ignored by these trade partners of India. While the USA, which brought Monsanto to India, tops this list, others like Canada, Australia and Argentina, too, share space on the same.

Be it the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (signed in 2001), aimed at eliminating or restricting the production and use of persistent organic pollutants, or the Rotterdam Convention (adopted first in 1998) on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for certain hazardous chemicals and pesticides in international trade, these countries have not given their consent to any of the above. While most have signed the treaties and even made tall claims about honouring them, they are still far from ratifying these safeguards drawn up at global conventions.

"It is detrimental to India's interest to enter into trade relations with countries that do not want to adhere to global regimes. If it does so, without these nations agreeing to bio-safety protocols, it is us who will be at a loss tomorrow," argued Sridhar Radhakrishnan, convener of a national coalition for a GM-Free India. From being 'dumped' with poor quality genetically modified organisms (GMOs) from these trade partners to being forced to buy processed products that do not meet safety parameters, the experts made it clear that there was much to be worried about. And while any collaboration with US seems to be creating the greatest apprehensions, business with countries like Argentina, too, isn't being well received by researchers. "India is now negotiating a bilateral free trade agreement on biotechnology with Argentina. In such a scenario, it is important that the partner country adopts all global safety regimes," said a legal expert participating in the ongoing CoP-11.

Fingers have also been pointed at India for its poor compliance with CBD, and experts have roundly condemned those nations which were taking part in policy-making discussions despite failing to adhere to environmental conventions. "The US has no regulation in GMOs. Why is it then being allowed to sit in on the deliberations," questioned Aruna Rodrigues, the lead petitioner in a public interest litigation filed in the Supreme Court on GMOs in early 2005, expressing serious doubt over Indo-US trade relations in the future.

But environmentalists maintained that all was not lost and stressed on the need for the Hyderabad chapter of CoP to be aimed at strengthening global bio-safety rules and pushing nations to implement these rules while engaging in bilateral trade.

"These countries, especially the US, are global bullies. And that's the problem facing all conventions, right from those on biodiversity to those on climate change. But we still have to keep trying," said Sunita Narain, director general, Centre for Science and Environment.