

PM's address at the inauguration of 13th COP to the Convention on Migratory Species in Gandhinagar Gujarat – 17 February, 2020

My dear friends!

I am happy to welcome you all to the 13th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Migratory species, at Gandhinagar, the land of the Mahatma Gandhi.

India is one of the most diverse countries of the world. With 2.4% of world's land area, it contributes about 8% of the known global biodiversity. India is blessed with diverse ecological habitats and also has four biodiversity hot spots. They are - the Eastern Himalayas, Western Ghats, Indo-Myanmar landscape and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. In addition, India is also home to around 500 species of migratory birds from across the globe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For ages, conservation of wildlife and habitats has been a part of the cultural ethos of India, which encourages compassion and co-existence. Our Vedas spoke of protection of animals. Emperor Ashoka put great emphasis on prohibiting the destruction of forests and the killing of animals. Inspired by Gandhi Ji, the ethos of non violence and protection of animals and nature has been suitably enshrined in the Constitution of India. It also finds reflection in several laws and legislations.

Sustained efforts over the years have led to encouraging results. The number of Protected Areas have increased from 745 in 2014 to 870 in the year 2019 with an area coverage of nearly 1 lakh seventy thousand sq.kms.

India's forest cover has increased significantly. The present assessment also indicates that the total forest cover is 21.67% of the total geographical area of the country.

India has been championing Climate action based on the values of conservation, sustainable lifestyle and green development model. The range of our initiatives include ambitious target of 450 MW in renewable energy, push towards Electric Vehicles, Smart Cities, Conservation of Water, etc.

The International Solar Alliance, the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, and Industries Transition Leadership with Sweden, have seen encouraging participation from wide array of countries. India is one

of the few countries whose actions are compliant with the Paris Agreement goal of keeping rise in temperature to below 2 degree Celsius.

Friends,

India has initiated focussed species conservation projects/ programmes. These have shown great results. The number of Tiger Reserves has increased from 9 since its formative years, to 50 at present. At present India has the distinction of having a population of almost 2970 tigers. India has achieved its target of doubling the number of tigers two years before the committed date of 2022. I call upon Tiger Range Countries present here and also others to come together to strengthen tiger conservation through sharing of benchmarking practices.

India is supporting more than 60% of global Asian elephant population. 30 Elephant Reserves have been identified by our States. India has also taken several initiatives and set standards for conservation of Asian elephants.

We have launched **Project Snow Leopard** to protect the Snow leopard and its habitat in the upper Himalayas. India recently hosted the Steering Committee of the Global Snow Leopard Ecosystem Programme (GSLEP) of 12 Countries, which resulted in New Delhi declaration envisaging development of country specific framework and cooperation between countries for snow leopard conservation. I am happy to share that India would be taking a leadership role in promoting Green Economy including conservation of mountain ecology with people's participation.

Friends,

The Gir landscape in Gujarat is the only home for the Asiatic Lion and the pride of the country. We have initiated an **Asiatic Lion Conservation project** since January 2019 to protect the Asiatic Lion. I am happy to share that, today, the population of Asiatic lions stands at 523.

In India, the **One-horned Rhinoceros** are found in three States of Assam, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The Government of India launched the "National Conservation Strategy for the Indian One-Horned Rhinoceros" in the year 2019.

The Great Indian Bustard, a critically endangered bird has also been at the focus of our conservation efforts. As part of the captive breeding programme, 9 eggs have been successfully hatched from wild. This has been accomplished by Indian Scientists and Forest Department with technical assistance from International Fund for Houbara Conservation, Abu Dhabi.

We have therefore, made the mascot, GIBI- The Great', as a tribute to the Great Indian Bustard.

Friends,

India is honoured to host the 13th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species at Gandhinagar.

As you might have noticed, the CMS COP 13 Logo is inspired by the traditional 'KOLAM' from southern India, which has a profound significance in the context of living in harmony with the nature.

Friends,

We have been traditionally practicing the mantra of "Athithi Devo Bhava", this has been reflected in the slogan/theme for the CMS COP 13: "*Migratory species connect the planet and together we welcome them home*". These species move between countries without any passports or visa, but are messengers of peace and prosperity and it is our responsibility to protect them.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

India would hold the Presidency of this convention for the coming three years. During its Presidency, India would steer in the following areas: India is a part of the Central Asian Flyway for migratory birds. With a view to conserve the birds along the Central Asian Flyway and their habitats, India has prepared a 'National Action Plan for conservation of Migratory Birds along the Central Asian Flyway'. India would be happy to facilitate preparation of Action Plans for other countries in this regard. We are keen to take the conservation of migratory birds to a new paradigm with active cooperation of all the Central Asian Flyway Range Countries. I also wish to establish an institutional mechanism for undertaking research, studies, assessments, capacity development and conservation initiatives by creating a common platform.

Friends, India has about 7500 kms coastline and Indian marine waters are rich in biodiversity, with innumerable species. India proposes to strengthen its association with the ASEAN and East Asia Summit countries. This would be in sync with the Indo Pacific Ocean Initiative (IPOI), wherein India will be playing a leadership role. India by 2020, will be launching its Marine Turtle Policy and Marine Stranding Management Policy. This will also address the pollution caused by micro-plastics. Single use plastics have been a challenge for environment protection and we in India have been on a mission mode to reduce its usage.

Friends,

Several Protected Areas in India share common boundaries with the Protected Areas of neighbouring countries. Cooperation in conservation

of wildlife through establishment of ‘Trans boundary Protected Areas’, would lead to very positive outcomes.

Friends,

My Government firmly believes in the path of sustainable development. We are ensuring that development happens without harming the environment. We have released the Linear Infrastructure Policy Guidelines to tailor development in ecologically fragile areas.

People are being made important stake-holders in the task of preserving the natural resources for future generations. My Government has been marching ahead with the slogan “*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikaas, Sabka Vishwaas*”. Millions of people living in vicinity of forest area in the country have now been integrated in the form of Joint Forestry Management Committees and Eco Development Committees and associated with the protection of forest and wildlife.

Friends,

I am sure this conference will provide an excellent platform for experience sharing and capacity building in the area of species and habitat conservation. I also hope you will get the time to experience India's hospitality and rich diversity.

Thank you.

Thank you very much.