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DETERIORATING ECOSYSTEM: PAKISTAN AT HIGH RISK

Speakers at the inaugural session of the 5th South and Central Asia Man and Biosphere Network (SACAM) meeting warned that the South and East Asian countries are most vulnerable due to the deteriorating ecosystem and Pakistan in this context is at high risk.

They said that the receding of glaciers in the northern areas has resulted in devastating floods in the recent past, which destroyed settlements and agriculture lands causing serious problem to the national economy and revenue collection from agriculture sector.

The two-day meeting was organised by Ministry of Science and Technology(MoST), Pakistan Science Foundation (PSF), Pakistan Museum of Natural History (PMNH) and UNESCO where participants would discuss about SACAM progress and future plans, harmonisation of community livelihoods with biodiversity conservation in the context of biosphere reserves, new trends in Man and Biosphere Reserves (BRs) and progress in member countries, biodiversity and emerging global issues in the BRs as well as country presentations, networking session and group discussion on strengthening SACAM Network. Officials and representatives of the ministry for science and technology, PSF, Unesco and representatives from the member states including Pakistan, India, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka participated in the meeting. The chair of the SACAM has been handed over to Pakistan for the next two years.

Addressing on the occasion, Federal Minister for Science and Technology Zahid Hamid said the government is preparing a document for the approval of the protection of the Karakoram Pamir Biosphere Reserve in the Northern Pakistan. Referring to the Global Climate Risk Index developed by German watch, he said that since 1992-2011, Thailand, Cambodia, Pakistan, El Salvador and the Philippines were among the most affected countries due to climate change and environmental degradation which he said is a great concern. He said this forum would provide a good opportunity to work together to mitigate the risks related to climate change.

The minister further said that the ministry is working on the national agenda to have a sound and sustainable science and technological (S&T) research base to achieve socio-economic development of the country as well as the vision for a better Pakistan and better world. Zahid Hamid said Unesco Biosphere Reserves are model regions for sustainable development. They protect biodiversity, support regional marketing and promote low-impact tourism as well as innovative and environment-friendly agriculture, he said.

Highlighting the importance of climate change, desertification and water shortage in today world, the

minister stressed that sustainable development is the alternative solution to encounter the escalating global climate change. He said a further important aspect of biosphere reserves is to look at cultural landscapes. There is a common recognition around the world that the diversity of life involves both the biological diversity and cultural diversity, he added.

Kamran Ali Qureshi Secretary MoST said sustainable use of natural resources through communities' involvement is vital to biodiversity conservation on which the future of our coming generations hinges upon. He said the communities have proved the best preservation of their areas of biodiversity. He remarked that if we will not develop a sustainable eco-system then we will have to face the music in the form of desertification, land erosion and droughts etc.

Chairman PSF Dr Khalil Ahmed Ibupoto said the adoption of Agenda 21 in Rio de Janeiro prompted necessary changes in political reasoning and action. The world community has recognised that without this change of direction towards sustainable development, life would not be worth living for future generations, he said, adding that climate change and biodiversity loss were recognised as being the most urgent global environmental problems.

He said in one year it has been able to get designation of one biosphere reserve, ie Ziarat Juniper Biosphere Reserve, from Unesco, submitted nomination of another biosphere ie Karakoram Pamir Biosphere Reserve and reviewed status of already declared Biosphere Reserve, the Lal Sohanara Biosphere Reserve.

Secretary SACAM Ram Boojh, Secretary Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Program Unesco Qun Li Han, UNESCO Pakistan Country Director Dr KK Nagata, PMNH Director General Akhter Javed and Country Focal Person MAB Pakistan Dr Rafiq also spoke on the occasion. They said the biosphere reserves are areas of terrestrial and coastal ecosystems, recognised by Unesco's Man and the Biosphere Program, as being uniquely important culturally and ecologically, while promoting solutions to reconcile the conservation of biodiversity with its sustainable use".

Dr Kozue Kay Nagata, Director/Representative Unesco Islamabad said that SACAM is a remarkable platform of MAB professionals, conservationists, scientists, research students of the member states and that the programme is progressing well. As a result of these efforts, this year, Ziarat Juniper Forest of Balochistan, the second largest juniper forest in the world, has been declared Biosphere Reserve and included in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

Han Qunli, Director, Division of Ecological and Earth Sciences and Secretary, MAB Programme at UNESCO said that the World Network of Biosphere Reserves as of today has 621 sites in 117 countries, and the number is continued to increase, with also the new sites from South and Central Asian countries. Biosphere Reserves are designated for conservation of both biological diversity and cultural diversity, and for testing new ways and solutions for local sustainable development agenda.

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