

Deforestation very high in Western Ghats

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EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

Coimbatore, Feb 6: Deforestation rate in Coimbatore and Palghat regions of the Western Ghats is alarmingly high, said Pandurang Hegde, of Appiko movement, while speaking at the one-day symposium on 'Future of Western Ghats' organised by Keystone Foundation here recently.

"The significance of the Western Ghats extends

beyond the narrow political boundaries of the states. The entire region stands to gain as it is the gateway to life-saving monsoons that provide water for the sub-continent," he pointed out.

The change in land use from forests to mono culture plantations has had disastrous consequences for the ecology of the ghats, he said and added that it is a challenge as well as an opportunity for the dwellers of the Western Ghats to raise the stakes for conservation.

"In many ways the paradise called the Western Ghats may have already been lost," quipped Dr Sudhirendar Sharma, who recently travelled across the length of the Western Ghats to bring out a travelogue-cum-report 'Paradise Lost - almost'.

While capturing the significant transformation the region had undergone in the recent past, the report acknowledges the apathy towards conservation amongst the stakeholders also. Taking cue from history, the report argues that "paradise can indeed be regained" if fresh efforts are made to revive the erstwhile 'Save the Western Ghats'

movement of the mid-1980.

'The stakes for saving the Western Ghats are much higher and the scope much wider', argued Sharma.

What is Amazon to South America is Western Ghats to Asia, he said.

"The incredible gains of conservation stretch far beyond the often-narrowly conceived ecological gains. Opportunities do exist to encash forest conservation as 'Global Forest Compensation Window' is being created at global level," he added.

Siruthuli, WWF, Coimbatore, Green Hands Project, Isha Foundation, Forest College, Mettupalayam, C R Bijoy, Human Rights Activist and Dr Sudhirendar Sharma, environmental activist and writer from New Delhi participated in the symposium.

B J Krishnan (Save Nilgiris Campaign), R Kannan (Palni Hills Conservation Council) and Snehlata Nath (Keystone Foundation) spoke on the occasion.