

Biodiversity's brain centre is here

By Express News Service - CHENNAI

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The National Biodiversity Authority and the Division of Nature Management, Norway have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to establish the first ever Centre for Biodiversity Policy and Law (CEBPOL) in Chennai.

Addressing reporters after signing the memorandum, National Biodiversity Authority chairman Dr Balakrishna Pisupati and head of the Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management Gunn Paulsen said that the centre would provide professional support, advice and expertise to the governments of India and Norway on a sustained basis on matters relating to biodiversity policies. This will be in addition to international negotiations relating to biodiversity in multilateral forums.

Pisupati said the centre would soon become a hub of activity on matters relating to policies and law relating to biodiversity. It will act like a think-tank on issues concerning biodiversity. Besides focusing on access and benefit sharing (ABS) protocol, both countries will share expertise on framing the Revised National Biodiversity Action Plan that is likely to be completed by mid next year. The centre will function with an initial budget of Rs 17.5 crore for the next three years.

The focus of the centre will be on regulating invasive species, one of the 10 themes that the centre will be working on. Pisupati said that invasive species damage the land and water that native plants and animals need to survive. They hurt economies and threaten the well-being of humanity. The estimated damage from invasive species worldwide amounts to more than \$3 trillion.

Dr C Thomson Jacob, consultant of the ABS project, and C Achalender Reddy, secretary of the National Biodiversity Authority, said that currently India was only focusing on quarantine measures when alien species are imported to India. "We don't know whether these species are required at all in India as we don't have any mechanism for that," said Reddy.

He said the centre would work towards bringing out a uniform policy for various departments in the centre and states so that a regulatory policy was evolved.

The 10 themes the centre will work on are access benefit sharing, invasive alien species, national biodiversity strategy and action plan, synergy of biodiversity related convention, nature index, biosafety, amendment to the Biological Diversity Act, mainstreaming of biodiversity, conference of parties and beyond, and the economies of ecosystem and biodiversity (TEEB).