NEWS AND NOTES

World Environment Day, 5th June, 2011 – P. Krishnamurthy and R.H. Sawkar (Email: geosocind@gmail.com)

The Earth Day (ED) was celebrated on 22nd April, 2011 under the aegis of the Geological Society of India, sponsored by the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), Government of India, came to a formal conclusion on 5th June, 2011, World Environment Day (WED) programme with participation of students and teachers from 12 schools (8 from Bangalore, 2 from Tumkur, and one each from Ranebennur and Hospet). A large number of fellows of the Society participated in the celebrations. A formal welcome was accorded to the Chief Guest Chiranjeevi Singh, IAS, former Additional Chief Secretary, Govt. of Karnataka, and guests of honour Anur Reddy, IFS, Chief Conservator of Forests, Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Ltd. and V.S. Prakash, Director, Karnataka State Natural Disaster Management Cell, Govt. of Karnataka. The function was presided over by Prof. S.K. Tandon, Vice President of the Geological Society of India and Councillor, International Union of Geological Sciences, Paris.

Anur Reddy spoke on the theme ‘Forests: nature at your service’, importance of forests in maintaining the ecological balance as also their pivotal role in sustaining water resources both surface and ground and in mitigating climate change. He outlined the plans of afforestation programmes by the government in the coming decades so that about 30% of the country’s land will come under forests from the existing area of about 21%. He recollected the salubrious climate that prevailed during 1970’s in Bangalore and lamented about the deterioration of the same with lapse of time. He cautioned that unless the lakes and other surface water bodies are regenerated Bangalore will degrade further. He pleaded that everyone should try to contribute positively to its growth.

V.S. Prakash outlined as how the global warming is causing increasing numbers of natural disasters as the unprecedented floods of Karnataka during 2009-10. He said that out of the estimated loss of about 1 lakh crores due to floods in the last 10 years, only about 2000 crores has been provided as relief by the government and the remainder absorbed by the society. Among the 176 taluks in Karnataka, 86 are drought prone whereas in 24 taluks desertification processes have set in. Climate change can bring about 2-4 degree rise in temperature in northern Karnataka which is a serious challenge. Considering the seriousness of the issue, degradation of the environment has been included as part of the 2005 Disaster Management Act of India. He pleaded that students and teachers should participate in numerous awareness programmes besides visiting GPS centres that record rainfall, weather and others and called for adoption of Japanese type conservation approaches to protect the environment.

The first and second prize winners of the elocution spoke on the occasion. Miss B. Harini of Brigade School, Bangalore who stood first spoke eloquently on ‘Sustainable water Resources and the Challenges’. She began her speech by quoting Gandhi that “the earth provides enough for human needs but not for human greed” and went on to narrate as how water is essential for sustaining life on earth as also for supporting all vital sectors of development such as industry (power, chemical and others) and agriculture. She also highlighted the unique features of groundwater and emphasized the need for rainwater harvesting. Ms. Nidhisri from Deepayan English High School spoke on ‘Saving Earth’. She narrated how earth has taken billions of years to evolve its present atmosphere so conducive to life and how pollution of air, land and water by numerous human activities has affected the environment. She pleaded for the use of renewable energy such as solar, wind to control further damage to environment.

The chief guest Chiranjeevi Singh after releasing a pamphlet on ‘World Environment Day’ spoke about the significant aspects of Indian culture as contrasted with the western one and the linkage of our culture to forests and river valleys as made out in our ancient epics. The culture-shift has resulted in the degradation of forests vis a vis environment. While China and USA lead in afforestation programmes, India on the

Students participated in the elocution competition.
contrary lacks in matching a forest in relation to deforestation carried out by numerous activities such as laying of roads and mining. He further recalled Tagore’s story of ‘Message from the Forests’ which even helps the ‘union of souls’. He cited the FAO’s report in which it says that in the last 10 years, 13 million hectares of forests/yr, almost the size of England, has been lost. He concluded that the problems we face in terms of population, water shortage, climate change are formidable with no end in sight, we should not despair and continue to be sensitive and strive to protect the environment.

The Chief Guest then distributed prizes to all the school level as well as the central-level competitors in the essay, elocution and painting contests.

In his presidential remarks, Prof. Tandon remarked that it is a rare event in which there were close interaction between the 70 year old and the younger generation. He said that humans should come out of their ‘anthropocentric’ attitude and share the earth resources with all its habitants including all forms of flora and fauna. He cited B.P. Radhakrishna’s concern of the over exploitation of the groundwater resources in Punjab and Haryana to produce basmati rice for exports, not realizing that it requires such overexploitation leading to irreparable damages to the groundwater aquifer system. Earth’s resources are finite and pleaded for judicious use with utmost care for conservation.

R.H. Sawkar, while congratulating the participants from different schools, asked them to participate in the International Earth Science Olympiad conducted at the all India level. The celebrations ended with a formal vote of thanks by Jaisimha Rao of CHRD, Bangalore.