

Science Express biodiversity special flagged off

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The minister of State (Independent Charge) Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Mr Prakash Javadekar along with the minister of railways, Mr D V Sadananda Gowda and the minister of state (Independent Charge) science and technology, Dr Jitendra Singh flagged off the 3rd phase of Science Express Biodiversity Special (SEBS) at Safdarjung Railway Station on July 28, 2014. An innovative exhibition on wheels, this train aims to create awareness amongst masses in general and youth in particular about the exceptional biodiversity of India. It is a flagship venture of the ministry of environment, forests and climate change, ministry of science and technology and Indian Railways.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr Javadekar said in order to evince interest among people, an advertising campaign would be initiated so as to sensitize and educate the masses on the nuances of the rich biodiversity of the country. In order to take the issue associated with biodiversity forward, the society needed to base its foundation on the rationale of scientific temper. It was important in the backdrop of India comprising 2.5 percent of land mass on earth, 17 percent of the world population and yet being home to only 8 percent of the world biodiversity. The minister added that this was no ordinary train. It is a journey of learning, spreading the message of biodiversity conservation and telling people that even in these modern times, we still have to depend on biodiversity. The train, covering a span of 194 days and 57 locations, would benefit 30 lakh students, he said.

Highlighting the importance of the initiative, the minister mentioned that the train was in fact the brand ambassador of COP 11. It showcased the rich biodiversity of India to delegates from over 190 countries. For this, the train was stationed at Secunderabad in October 2012 to facilitate visit of delegates to "the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biodiversity." Indeed, there were quite a few records and milestones that the train is believed to have achieved. It was perhaps the world's most visited train exhibition. Within India, it had gone to the highest rail track possible for broad gauge, and also covered some extreme locations in the north, south, east, and west.

In his address, the Railway Minister, Mr Sadananda Gowda stated that this initiative was unique and innovative as it touched "real India". It provided a platform to showcase the achievements of science to the people. Minister for Science & Technology, Shri Jitendra Singh mentioned that science needed to be utilized for the larger picture of social transformation. This implied using science for optimum social progress and scientific transformation.

The present run of the train is in the 3rd Phase. In this phase, the train is envisaged to cover 57 locations on Broad Gauge network of Indian Railways across the entire length and breadth of the country. Of the 16 coaches of the Science Express-

Biodiversity Special, 8 are solely dedicated to showcasing the myriad biodiversity spread across all the bio-geographical zones of India through a variety of interactive exhibits, short films and videos that are shown on Plasma and LED TV screens, large format displays, kiosks and back lit panels. The remaining coaches have interesting and informative exhibits on Climate Changes, Energy and Water conservation and other topical issues.

The current decade (2011-2020) has been declared as the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity and United Nations Decade for Deserts and Fight against Desertification. The `Science Express â€“ Biodiversity Special`, therefore, primarily addresses the theme `biodiversity`. The state-of-the-art exhibition aboard SEBS aims to create wide-spread awareness on the unique biodiversity of India, Climate Change, Water, Energy Conservation and related issues among various sections of the society, especially students.

Since its launch in 2012, the Science Express Biodiversity Special train has covered 114 stations and travelled across more than 37000 kms in the first two phases. Phase-I of the SEBS was launched on World Environment Day (5 June, 2012) from Safdarjung Railway Station, New Delhi. Phase-II of the SEBS was launched on April 9, 2013 from the same station in Delhi. It covered 62 locations and over 22 lakh people, including 5 lakh students and 29,000 teachers from 6005 schools, enjoyed learning in a fun filled way.

The present phase would culminate on 4th February, 2015 at Gandhinagar, Gujarat after covering 57 locations whereby the SEBS train would have covered most of the major stations across the country.