

**Andaman and Nicobar Administration
Directorate of IP&T
Information & Publicity Division**

Port Blair July 31, 2018.

Press Release

Month long 'Van Mahotsav' culminates

**Lt Governor calls upon Islanders to contribute towards
conservation, expansion & enrichment of forests**

Port Blair, July 31: The Lt. Governor, A&N Islands, Admiral DK Joshi, PVSM, AVSM, YSM, NM, VSM (Retd.) has called upon the people of the Islands, especially the students, teachers, members of PRIs and social organizations to take the message of environment conservation to the masses, so as to sustain and further increase the greenery of these Islands. He was speaking at the valedictory function of the 69th Van Mahotsav, organised by the Department of Environment & Forests, A&N Administration, in the auditorium of Tagore Govt College of Education (TGCE) here this afternoon. The Chief Secretary, A&N Administration, Shri K.R. Meena, PCCF, A&N Islands, Shri Tarun Coomar, senior officers of the Administration, officials of Forest Department, students, teachers, parents and PRI Members were also present on the occasion.

The Lt. Governor informed the gathering how the term 'Van Mahotsav' was coined in the year 1947, when a successful tree plantation drive was conducted by leaders like Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Thereafter, in 1950, the then Union Minister for Agriculture and Food, Dr. KM Munshi called for celebrating 'Van Mahotsav' every year. The Lt. Governor further explained the main objectives of this campaign viz. increasing the production of fruits, helping in creation of shelterbelts around agricultural fields, to provide fodder for animals, encouraging the conservation of soil health and stopping soil erosion etc.

The Lt. Governor further said, the A&N Islands is enriched with dense forests, clean and untouched sea beaches and other fascinating sea organisms. "We have dense forest on about 86% land, and besides depicting high degree of endemism, these Islands also houses rare ecosystems like seagrass meadows, coral reefs, mangroves, tropical forest etc. We are proud of the Islands' environment, forests and rich bio-diversity", he said.

The Lt. Governor also expressed happiness that as per the latest report of the Forest Survey of India, the forest area in the A&N Islands has increased by 40 sq kms, including 13 sq. kms of mangroves while there has been an improvement in the quality of the forests as well. This has become possible due to plantation and effective preservation of forest and our commitment towards the eco restoration of forests and mangroves, said the Lt. Governor.

Congratulating all the stakeholders and the people for their participation in the 69th 'Van Mahotsav' celebrations throughout the Islands, the Lt. Governor said, respecting forest is part of our culture; and called upon all to take interest in the conservation and protection of nature along with planting of trees. The Lt. Governor asked the Forest Department to involve the general public in environment protection for the overall economic and social development of the Islands. He also urged one and all to contribute towards the conservation, expansion and enrichment of forests for the benefit of the community at local, regional and global level.

Addressing the gathering, the Chief Secretary, A&N Administration, Shri KR Meena remarked that water, soil and all other life forms originate from the forests. He said water and forests are important assets for all living beings and judicious use of natural resources is vital. Citing example of the importance of Khejri trees for the people of Rajasthan, the Chief Secretary remarked that people of Rajasthan are striving hard to protect and conserve the khejri trees as it provides food, firewood and supports the rural economy. He said the A&N Islands are blessed with rich flora and fauna and are a hotspot for bio-diversity, hence, we must ensure judicious utilization of the forest, keeping in mind the need for conservation and protection of the forest for the future generation.

Lauding the Department of Environment and Forests for its untiring efforts towards preservation and conservation of Isles' forest cover and vegetation, the Chief Secretary remarked that the responsibility of preservation and conservation of forest and its biodiversity lies in the hands of every individual and urged the Islanders to work in tandem with the Forest Department in creating awareness and sensitizing people about the need for protection of forest. He also called upon the Islanders to bring to the notice of the Forest Officials, any illegal activity, which harms the environment we live in.

Speaking on the occasion, the PCCF, A&N Islands, Shri Tarun Coomar remarked that the word 'Van Mahotsav' which means the

'festival of trees', has been bringing multitudes of people across the country towards the common goals of planting more trees since 1950. The former Minister of Agriculture & Food, Dr K.M. Munshi was instrumental in giving prominence to the celebration of 'Van Mahotsav' which is celebrated every year in the month of July.

He said, the significance of 'Van Mahotsav' has its relevance with the celebration of 'Rath Yatra' as during the celebration of Rath Yatra, in places like Bihar, Orissa, Bengal people plant atleast one sapling each.

The dignitaries also distributed prizes to the winners of various competitions organized by the Forest Extension & Publicity Division of the Department of Environment & forests, as part of the observance of the month long Van Mahotsav here in the Isles. A documentary on celebration of 69th Van Mahotsav in the Isles was also screened on the occasion. The students of TGCE presented a welcome song on the occasion.

Earlier, the CCF (R&WP) Shri Anand Krishna welcomed the gathering while the programme culminated with the vote of thanks proposed by DFO (FE&PD) Shri Ayyub Hassan.



