

PRESS NOTE MOEFCC

MoU between Natural History Museum (NHM),UK and Botanical Survey of India(BSI), India

In the presence of Dr Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Sh C.K. Mishra, Secretary, MOEFCC and Sh A K Jain, Additional Secretary, MOEFCC, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is signed between the Director, Botanical Survey of India and the Director, Natural History Museum(NHM), UK and the papers were exchanged on 16th February, 2018 between Dr Paramjit Singh, Director, BSI and Dr Sandra Knapp, Head of the Algae, Fungi and Plants Division, NHM.

The MoU will pave a way for BSI staff to work in Natural History Museum, London and vice-versa and they will share fairly and equitably the benefits that may arise from the collection, study and conservation of the plant materials such as seeds, herbarium specimens and tissue samples and exchange associated data and images. NHM will help BSI in capacity building in areas of systematic botany and long term conservation of plant genetic resources in India.

Botanical research has a long history in India, and modern scientific institutions have developed over two centuries. The collections of Indian plants held in UK institutions, together with India's own tremendous collections, are an invaluable resource for modern Indian botanical science. Collections, digitisation and study by Indian scientists will make these openly available for wider scientific use in India in areas such as biodiversity conservation, environmental protection, and preservation of plant resources for use in traditional health systems by rural communities.

Lakhs of herbarium specimens of Indian plants are located in the Natural History Museum in London, and a renewed partnership with the Botanical Survey of India is creating digital images of these specimens to make them available to Indian science. Three staff members of BSI have received Rutherford Fellowships (funded by the UK government's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy - BEIS) to undertake this important work in London. They have received training in all aspects of digitisation and herbarium curation, and have already imaged some 16,000 sheets in plant families that are essential to crop science and food security. At the same time two botanists from NHM are working in BSI herbaria throughout the country identifying specimens, capacity building, interacting with young Indian taxonomists and exchanging ideas.

This open science and collaboration is a core goal of both Botanical Survey of India and Natural History Museum, and with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between BSI and NHM it is set to develop further to the benefit of both India and the UK. Both countries are committed to the use of scientific evidence to support the goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity, CITES and the Nagoya Protocol - this MOU will enable research that will underpin these national responsibilities.

Capacity building and scientific exchange between India and the UK will also be central to future work under the Memorandum of Understanding, enabling us to learn from each other and work collaboratively to address important scientific questions and deliver benefit to humanity.