

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NATURAL FIBRES

Kolkata, West Bengal: August 1, 2014

1. It is indeed a happy occasion for me this evening to participate in the inauguration of the International Conference on Natural Fibres, which has been organized to mark the conclusion of the Platinum Jubilee Celebrations of the National Institute of Research on Jute and Allied Fibre Technology (NIR-JAFT). This Institute, which is one of the constituents of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, is dedicated to the development of jute and allied fibres technology.
2. In a changing world economic and environmental scenario, there is a need to evaluate the role of jute and allied fibres. A conference of this nature is therefore timely and I compliment NIR-JAFT and the other collaborators – National Jute Board, Indian Natural Fibre Society and Central Research Institute for Jute and Allied Fibres – for convening it. I am glad to have the opportunity to share some of my perceptions with this distinguished gathering of experts on jute and allied fibres, researchers, policy makers and entrepreneurs.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

3. Jute is an important agricultural fibre crop in Eastern India. Till the Seventies, it was an important commodity for exports and was rightly named 'golden fibre'. India is currently the largest producer of raw jute fibres and jute products in the world. Industrial production of jute goods comprises mainly packaging materials, sacking and hessian, which account for 82 percent of the total production. Unfortunately, there has been a lack of growth orientation in the jute industry during the last few decades. In the face of stiff competition from substitutes, mainly synthetics, it has gradually lost its prime position as a packaging material.
4. A host of reasons have led to the disquieting trends in this industry. Absence of up-gradation and modernization; over dependence on Government's order for mandatory use of sacking bags; stagnant productivity levels; limited scope for value-addition of sacking and hessian; seasonal fluctuations in supply and price of raw jute; gradual decline in production of raw jute of superior grades; imbalance in price structure of jute goods, and inadequate demand at international level have adversely affected the jute sector. Adding

to its woes is inadequate availability of machinery for increased productivity and quality assurance; industry apathy for technology absorption and product diversification; and insufficient export promotion and marketing strategy.

5. A concerted effort by all stakeholders is necessary to develop the jute sector. Serious attempts have to be made to transform the image of jute products from cheap packaging material to value-added products suitable for diversified end-uses. The global concern for environment and increasing consumer preference for bio-degradable natural fibre products have opened a window of opportunity for enhanced use of jute. To realize this potential, technical capabilities have to be boosted through greater investment, technological up-gradation, market promotion and facilitatory government role. The National Fibre Policy 2010 aims at transforming the jute sector from a traditional labour-intensive industry to a self-reliant modern industry with state-of-the-art technology and wider product range. The Jute Technology Mission is expected to help the growth of jute-diversified products, especially in the export market.
6. Jute agriculture in general and post-harvest technology in particular needs special attention in terms of technology support and extension activities. Improvement in fibre yield, and production of fine fibre with improved strength, colour and luster and devoid of defects that arise on account of faulty retting, will ensure remunerative return to the jute farmers.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

7. Jute is compatible with the requirements of a clean environment. It is pertinent that it continues to be the preferred choice as a packaging material for food grains and sugar. However, steps are required to be taken to cut down its cost of production. For this, improved machinery has to be developed and measures for energy and waste management adopted. The manufacturing and quality assurance processes have to be up-graded. To cope with competition from other packaging materials like lighter synthetic bags, greater diversification is necessary to manufacture jute bags of varied types. For instance, production and promotion of hydrocarbon-free jute bag could cater to a large domestic market, besides meeting its export demand.
8. I am aware of some useful product innovations in the manufacture of jute-based shopping bags, footwear and handicrafts for use by the common man. I am told that the consumer response to these items has been encouraging. Jute shopping bags having assured quality has been received well in the developed markets of US and Europe. I look forward to the development of more such jute-diversified products, which are of daily use and good aesthetic value. I am confident that such products will find a ready market in India and abroad. A large manufacturing base for these items can be

established in the Eastern region as well as in other parts of the country. It will help generate employment, particularly in rural areas.

9. It is heartening to note that jute is gradually making in-roads in some areas of Technical Textiles, including geo-textiles and composites. In the field of construction, geo-textiles have established their merit in combating geo-technical problems. Jute has to find its rightful place in this growing field. For that, we must have the technical and manufacturing wherewithal to make varied geo-jute products that can find good market within the country and abroad. I hope that the outcome of the International Project on Jute Geo-textiles, being conducted in India and Bangladesh, will establish the efficacy of geo-jute application for enhanced rural road performance, protection of river bank and stabilization of hill slope. Similarly, I envisage the use of jute in manufacturing composite materials, suitable for specific applications in automobiles and construction, to prove its benefit in terms of cost-performance ratio.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

10. Many natural fibres allied to jute like Ramie, Coir, Sisal, Banana fibre and Pineapple fibre are available in our country. They all hold immense potential in manufacturing useful products. What is required is the judicious development of appropriate process technologies. This will pave the way for economic benefits to accrue to farmers and small entrepreneurs dealing with these fibres. There is need for sharing of knowledge and experience about different natural fibres and their products. The Indian Natural Fibre Society, which was launched two years ago, provides a platform to scientists, professionals and other stakeholders for promoting a scientific spirit towards the growth of natural fibres, in particular jute.
11. This International Conference on Natural Fibres, with focus on jute and allied fibres, is a right step forward for an understanding of the potential of these natural fibres. I am sure this forum will address all concerns to ensure greater use of these eco-fibres. The coming-together of different stakeholders associated with natural fibres will help identify the scope and strategy for purposeful utilization of our natural fibre resources, including jute. I am certain that this conference will lead to fruitful discussions, healthy exchange of ideas and concrete action plans for the future.
12. I wish the organizers a successful conduct of this Conference. I also wish them good luck for the future.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.
