

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI
PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE
CALL ON BY PROBATIONERS OF
INDIAN FOREST SERVICE 203-15 BATCH**

Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi: 05 AUGUST, 2014

Good Evening!

At the very outset, I welcome all of you in Rashtrapati Bhavan. I would like to congratulate you for joining the Indian Forest Service, one of the premier All India Services. It speaks of your academic excellence. By joining the Indian Forest Service, you have taken an important step forward in your professional career. This is just the beginning and you have a very rewarding and challenging career spanning over 33-35 years in the Government.

2. Forests have been an integral part of Indian ethos and culture. Our Civilization has always derived its intellectual and spiritual strength from Forests. The qualities such as tolerance and assimilation are very unique to our ethos as the Indian civilization has its roots in the forests. Forests, therefore, are not merely a resource, but they encompass the cultural, spiritual and intellectual heritage of the country. The Government has entrusted you with responsibility of protecting this greatly valuable heritage.

3. I am reminded of the famous wordings of the Father of our Nation, Mahatma Gandhi. He had said, (quote) “What we are doing to the forests of the world is but a mirror reflection of what we are doing to ourselves and to one another.” (unquote). In the last few decades, the world has woken up to the threats to the very survival of mankind due to environmental degradation, depletion in forest cover and above all, global warming leading to Climate Change. That is why Environment has emerged as the prime agenda for the 21st Century, of which forests are an integral part. To address adverse impacts arising out of climate change it is essential that countries come together to address this issue in a collective manner.

4. Forests, being a potential carbon sink, may be one of the important ways to reduce the increasing green house gases in the atmosphere and consequent threat of global warming. It is a known fact that Mangrove forests on the coast protect the coastal areas from cyclones and tsunamis; forests on the hill slopes protect the soils and prevent landslides and fresh floods; healthy watersheds having good forest cover insulate areas from the draughts and increase agricultural productivity. Indeed, forests take very little from us but they give so much to the mankind. It is imperative for our country to adopt sound practices for forest management to address the local issues as well as the global issues. The recent landslide case near Pune is an eye-opener for us to act immediately with full conviction.

5. The National Forest Policy aims at achieving 33% forest cover for the land mass of our country. The total forest and tree cover is approximately 24%, as per the India State Forest Survey Report 2013. We are still away from our goal. You, as young, enthusiastic and creative minds, are well placed to push for accomplishing this national goal.

6. Millions of poor people, including tribals, live in and around the forests of our country. These people look to the forest to meet their basic requirements of food, fuel wood, fodder and other small needs. I expect you to be sensitive to the needs of this segment of society. In the last few years our country has adopted joint forest management model, based upon care and share principle, which envisages participatory approach involving people in the management of the forests. You must take this forward and try to be a catalytic agent for the ecologically sustainable development of the communities living in and around the forests. There is no dearth of success models, wherein the forests could be effectively protected with the participation of the communities. With your experience, knowledge and training at your Academy, you can develop innovative model for participation of the communities for sharing of this natural wealth with the dependent community on the forest and also for conserving the forest itself.

7. The management of forests and its governance is a challenging task. This can be made citizen-friendly through extensive use of technology. I understand that Ministry is working towards the e-filing system for grant of forest clearance. This is a good beginning to bring technology in the management of forests. I would like to see the extensive use of technology in conservation, mapping and governance of the forests in the country.

8. India has announced its domestic mitigation goal of reducing emissions intensity of GDP by 20–25 per cent by 2020 compared with 2005. We also have the challenge of promoting rapid economic growth to meet the challenges of poverty and unemployment. To achieve the rapid economic growth with our commitment, we need to focus on low carbon inclusive growth strategy. This is where I see you all playing an important role to see India emerging as a 'low carbon economy' through innovative forest management and community participation programmes.

9. Being a Forester, your task is not easy one. The challenges before you are complex and the expectations from you will always be very high. Vast areas of this country need to be afforested. The various services and goods provided by the forests, such as clean water and air, Biodiversity values, soil and water conservation need to be enhanced. Satisfying all these requirements is not an easy task and will require not only the skills and knowledge you will learn during the training, but also the use of modern technology to bring about such a change. However with the hard work, determination and commitment towards your work, I am sure, you will be able to fulfill the hopes and trust, the country has reposed in you.

10. Before I conclude, I will request you to continue with the journey of learning. You must keep abreast with the changing international and domestic forest management issues and adopt the best practices in your profession. I will like you to remember what Gandhiji had said.

(Quote) “Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.” (Unquote)

Thank you
