

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON “SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE FOR FOOD AND LIVELIHOOD SECURITY” AT PUNJAB AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY, LUDHIANA**

Ludhiana, Punjab: 27-11-2012

“Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a privilege for me to be present here to extend to the faculty and students of the Punjab Agriculture University, my felicitations and best wishes on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of this great institution.

This is my first visit to Punjab in my present capacity. I had indeed looked forward to being here - amongst the distinguished scientists and experts present today. This Institution is synonymous with the Green Revolution which transformed Indian agriculture, making our country self reliant in feeding its population. Today, we produce enough to spare for export and assistance to other developing countries. It is the Punjab Agricultural University that pioneered agricultural research and technology dissemination in our country - at a time in the '60s when this was a crucial need. Its scientists engaged with a sense of urgency in research, innovation and foreign collaborations. They have since developed hundreds of new strains, high yielding and robust varieties of crops and studied the management of environmental, weather and soil conditions. I congratulate the Punjab Agriculture University for its splendid contribution in the service of our nation.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the agriculture sector in India continues to be the lifeline of our people and a key factor in our economy's overall productivity. It has rightly been accorded due priority in every budget and Plan for achieving India's developmental goals. Government of India has, over the decades, introduced a variety of schemes and measures to give support to the entire agriculture sector from small farmers to large investors. Institutions and banks have been created to focus on supporting agriculture development, fixing remunerative prices and improve agricultural marketing. The Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices and the Food Corporation of India have been set up to recommend Minimum Support Prices and procure grains for public stocks respectively, the NABARD and Regional Rural Banks to ensure easy and adequate credit availability, and programmes such as the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojna, National Food Security Mission and National Horticulture Mission have taken the Government's outreach to the farthest and remotest regions.

Promoting inclusive growth, sustaining food security and boosting rural incomes in the country is intrinsically linked to growth in the Agriculture sector. As the Finance Minister, I had outlined a four-pronged strategy as part of the Union Budget for 2010-11 to drive growth in the Agriculture sector. The first component of the strategy was to extend the green revolution to the Eastern region of the country comprising Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Eastern Uttar Pradesh, West

Bengal and Orissa. The second component of the strategy was to reduce the significant wastage in storage as well as in the operations of the existing food supply chains in the country. The third component was to improve credit availability to the farmers, while the fourth component was to aim at providing a further impetus to the development of the food processing sector by providing state-of-the-art infrastructure and substantial fiscal incentives.

The initiative of bringing green revolution to Eastern India has resulted in a significant increase in production of paddy, as States in Eastern India reported additional paddy production of 7 million tonnes in Kharif 2011. The total paddy production in the country increased from 95.98 million metric tonnes in 2010-11 to 104.32 million metric tonnes in 2011-12. Mr. Robert S. Zeigler, Director General of the International Rice Research Institute in Manila lauded our achievement when he mentioned that “the most heartening aspect of India crossing the 100 million tonne rice production mark is that a major contribution has been from Eastern India”. The total food grains production in the country increased from 244.78 million metric tonnes in 2010-11 to 257.44 million metric tonnes in 2011-12. To reduce wastage in storage, concrete steps have been taken by the Government to create additional food grain storage capacity in the country. Two million tonnes of storage capacity in the form of modern silos have already been approved for creation. Further, nearly 15 million tonnes of storage capacity is being created through private entrepreneurs and warehousing corporations. To enable the timely availability of affordable agriculture credit to the

farmers, the target for flow of agriculture credit has been enhanced in the Union Budgets from time to time, from Rs.3,75,000 crore in 2010-11 to Rs.5,75,000 crore in 2012-13. The Mega Food Park scheme, which was introduced in the Eleventh Plan, aims at developing farm proximate state of the art infrastructure with strong backward and forward linkage in a demand driven manner. 30 Mega Food Parks are being planned for creation in this financial year.

At the present juncture, we have come a long way. The growth rate of GDP in Agriculture and allied activities in 2011-12 is 2.8 per cent which is, of course, lower than the growth rate of 7 per cent in 2010-11 but higher than the growth rates of 0.4 per cent in 2008-09 and 1.7 per cent in 2009-10.

There is however, a reality that cannot be ignored – and I take this opportunity to call upon all present here today to reflect on why, despite all these successes and efforts and despite India's overall improved economic performance, the economic viability of this sector is still a challenge. There are, even today, so many regions in our country where subsistence farmers and small farmers remain susceptible to failure, risk and desperation. Despite various programmes and schemes of Government- complemented by the efforts of the scientific and corporate community, why is it that prosperity has eluded a large part of this sector? It is ironical that although India is the second largest producer of fruits and vegetables in the world, value addition to this produce is just 7 per cent and

processing only around 3 per cent of production. There is hardly any value addition at the farm level - and 98 per cent of farm produce is sold as it is harvested. Due to our tropical / subtropical conditions, more than 25% of production is lost during harvest and post harvest operations. We import a large amount of the pulses we consume. In the agriculturally advanced regions, there are problems of over-exploiting ground water resources and vulnerability to pests and crop diseases; over-mining of nutrient reserves has led to multi-nutrient deficiencies. Excessive use of fertilizers is taking its toll on the productivity of soil.

I recall a comment of Mahatma Gandhi which made a profound impression on me : He said, and I quote, “A farmer cannot work without applying his mind. He must be able to test the nature of his soil, must watch changes of weather, must know how to manipulate his plough skillfully and be generally familiar with the movements of the stars, the sun and the moon.....”

This is a compelling reason for the Indian farmer to be provided the wherewithal that he urgently needs - the financial, technological, infrastructural, transportation and other requirements for a sustainable approach for the increased productivity that we seek.

In this context, I take this opportunity to share a few thoughts on the challenges that we must address. We need to do a re-think on agriculture in India. And we need to do this urgently to ensure food security in India. We must have in place a coherent and comprehensive policy that has synergy among its various elements. Government initiatives are of little use without efficient systems for their implementation. Equally important is the necessity for collaboration between the state and central governments on the monitoring and appraisal of various schemes. A co-ordinated and integrated approach should start at the grassroots, taking into account all the factors.

Many policies are susceptible to failure because of inaccurate feedback. Collation of information and policy integration is essential. As I am among academia and experts, I would like to suggest that we identify the priorities and act swiftly. I would put training and entrepreneurship development high in my list of items requiring urgent attention. To this I would add the task of developing and reaching appropriate technology to farmers, agriculture marketing reforms, studying the present yield gaps and methods to harvest wastelands, address wastage and overuse of fertilizers and develop simple IT tools for farmers - that are user friendly and can provide relevant and timely information relating to weather forecasts. Enhanced productivity would reduce per unit cost, enhancing the global competitiveness of our produce.

Farm mechanization, linking farms with markets and adding value at each stage will help in employment generation, entrepreneurship development, increased profits to farmers and safe and healthy food to consumers. Investments in food processing sector have multiplying benefits for all, and hence a major boost needs to be given to the processing sector. Fiscal incentives and land leasing policies of State Governments should be such that agro-processing, especially in the rural areas, becomes a lucrative option both for the farmers and the private sector.

A useful part of the re-assessment would be a mapping and indexing of crops and livestock to anticipate market demands, plan resource allocation and ensure its optimal utilisation to ensure maximum output. This would give an edge in the global market. Similarly, the agro-industry, in partnership with research institutions can plan relevant and standardised crop production and efficient agricultural supply chains, which are vertically integrated. Improved connectivity between agricultural universities and the farmers could be very beneficial for both.

Most importantly, innovation—of new varieties, technologies and methods for post harvest processes--should move up on our priority list. The percentage of GDP from Agriculture and allied activities spent on research and development must be

increased from the current level of 0.6 per cent to 1.0 per cent in the Twelfth Five Year Plan.

I believe that a multi-pronged strategy involving technology development, new marketing methods, precision in farm operations and innovative policy instruments is required to ensure agricultural sustainability and food and livelihood security and I would stress the importance of due attention to modernising food storage and its distribution.

This Conference on Sustainable Agriculture for Food and Livelihood Security is, therefore, an important opportunity for stakeholders to review the current overall approach and, develop an updated, comprehensive strategy to accelerate agricultural growth and further strengthen national food and livelihood security in India

I also take this opportunity to convey my best wishes to the students and faculty for success in all their endeavours in years to come.

With these words, I have the pleasure to formally inaugurate this conference.

Jai Hind”