

"I am very pleased to be with you here at this ICAR-National Research Centre on Mithun, the only institute of its kind in the world solely dedicated to the conservation, propagation and development of Mithun which is endemic to the North-eastern States of India.

I am happy to know that the Institute has been playing a key role in the conservation, breeding, nutrition and health management of mithun and over the last three decades, has generated invaluable scientific data towards the understanding of this unique species.

Mithun is the state animal of Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland, and both states together account for 96% of the total 3.8 lakh Mithun population in India. It is a matter of satisfaction that according to the 20th Livestock Census (2019), the Mithun population recorded an overall increase of 30.6%. This is a healthy trend and must be sustained.

This magnificent bovine species is considered as one of the most important cultural resources of the North East and is deeply rooted in the mythology and folklore of the cultural life of the tribes in the region. Mithun is a symbol of social status in Naga society and it also represents peace and communal harmony. For the people of Nagaland, who take great pride in their glorious culture and history, their state animal holds immense significance economically, socially and emotionally. Mithun can become a symbol of India's spirit of 'unity in diversity'. We should make every effort for conservation and preservation of such unique symbols that represent our rich cultural heritage. I am happy that this Center has developed several packages of practices and technologies including an alternative system of rearing of mithun under semi-intensive systems.

It is praiseworthy that the National Research Center on Mithun has done excellent work in protection and preservation of this majestic animal. You have done full genome sequencing of mithun to understand its evolutionary history across the distinct geographical locations. Your notable achievements include development of simple technology for determination of age of Mithun by dentition patterns and development of low-cost complete feed block using locally available trees/shrubs and industrial by-products. I have been told that the Center has also developed Artificial Insemination protocols for Mithun and three calves were born through these technologies in the year 2012. Equally praiseworthy are your efforts in providing healthcare services to mithun farms in the area and development of a mithun mitra mobile app for the farmers.

I am told that you are seeking to diversify the use of mithun as a meat, milk, hide and draught animal. I compliment you for these efforts. I would suggest you to make efforts to attract the educated youth towards the conservation of this important animal.

Today, I am happy to meet the scientists from ICAR Research Complex for North East Hill (NEH) Region, which is a premier research institute under the Natural Resource Management division of ICAR.

I am told that the institution, since its inception in 1975, has been promoting and conducting research, extension and human resource development activities in agriculture and allied sectors for the hilly and mountain ecosystem of North Eastern states. With headquarters in Umiam, Meghalaya and regional centers in six states, it is one of the largest institutes of ICAR. I am happy to know that the institute has had several notable achievements including the development of fifty-six crop varieties.

As most of the farmers in North East are small and marginal land holders, the Institute's emphasis on promoting integrated farming systems comprising crop, livestock, poultry, fishery, and horticulture is praiseworthy. I am pleased to know that 50% of the poultry breeds reared in the state are of Vanaraja and Srinidhi, which are produced from this centre and cater to the needs of farmers in every nook and corner.

Dairying is an important ancillary activity in India that accounts for approximately one-third of rural household income. Some 70 million farmers, a majority of them women, are directly involved in dairying in the country and it is the only agri-product in which around 70-80 per cent final market value is shared with the farmers. Therefore, every effort must be made to promote dairying by adopting the latest technological advances in the field. I am happy that the ICAR Research Complex for NEH region is working to improve animal health coverage and livestock production systems including trans-boundary diseases. Your thrust on development of feed and fodder resources from locally available fodder for livestock is praiseworthy.

I always say that agriculture is the lifeline of the Indian economy. This is even more true for the North Eastern Region where more than 70% of the people are directly dependent on agriculture for their livelihood support. Therefore, agriculture has to be revolutionized for the progress and prosperity of the eight states of the North-Eastern Region. Our scientific institutions should work for development of location specific technologies which are sustainable, climate resilient and culturally in sync with the tribal cultures of the region.

As you are aware, agriculture in the hilly region of North East faces many constraints such as undulating terrain, inaccessibility, floods, soil erosion and landslides. Climate change is further accentuating these extreme events. I fear that this beautiful but ecologically fragile region will be very adversely impacted by any rise in global temperatures. Therefore, I urge our scientists and researchers to focus their attention in advance to find solutions to the farmers' problems likely to be caused by global warming.

We should focus not only on increasing productivity but also make sure that our agriculture practices are sustainable in the long term. I am happy to know that this ICAR Research Complex is working to evolve sustainable integrated farming systems for jhum improvement and restoration of degraded lands.

One good thing that I always appreciate about North Eastern States is their focus on organic agriculture. In this field, you are showing the way to the rest of India. Being a biodiversity hotspot, this region holds immense possibilities in production and marketing of natural products. I am happy that the ICAR Research Complex for NEH Region is focusing on the improvement of citrus plantation to reinvigorate the citrus industry in these states. I would also urge other Indian states to learn from the organic farming success story of the North Eastern States.

Friends,

I always say that technical knowhow generated in a laboratory has no meaning unless it reaches its intended beneficiaries i.e. our farmers. Seamless transfer of knowledge from 'Lab to land' should be our constant endeavor. I am happy to note that both ICAR institutes here - National Research Centre on Mithun and Research Complex for NEH Region are giving adequate attention to extension services and outreach programs. It is good to know that you have been organizing Mithun mela cum Technology Awareness programmes and also collaborating with NGOs, farmers bodies and cooperative societies from the region for dissemination of technologies developed by you. I compliment both Institute's initiatives towards doubling the farmers' income and creating self-reliant and self-sustaining tribal communities.

My best wishes for your future endeavours.

Thank you!

Jai Hind!"