

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SMT. DROUPADI MURMU
ON THE OCCASION OF CALL ON BY PROBATIONERS OF
INDIAN FOREST SERVICE**

Rashtrapati Bhavan, December 21, 2022

Dear probationers

I congratulate you all for your selection in the Indian Forest Service. A long career full of challenges and opportunities awaits you. You are the guardians of our rich and diverse forest wealth. You are also protectors of the heritage and culture of our forest dwelling communities. You have a key role to play in maintaining ecological stability of the country through participatory sustainable management.

Dear officers

As we all know, India is one of the ten most forest-rich countries of the world. Forests have been revered by our ancestors as we can see in our ancient scriptures.

A prayer from Atharva Veda (Kanda-12, Sukta-1, Mantra-11) highlights the importance of our natural resources:

गिरयस्ते पर्वता हिमवन्तोऽरण्यं ते पृथिवि स्योनमस्तु।

It signifies that our ancestors worshipped the Earth as mother. They revered the hills, snow-clad mountains and forests. The original prayer speaks about cultivable, fertile, nourishing black and red soils which are strong and resistant and protected by the ancestors from getting weak by destruction and degradation.

Forests are the anchors for all life on earth. Their role varies from providing wildlife habitats and being livelihood source, to promoting economic activities and serving as large carbon sinks. They are home to many endangered species of the world. The diverse range of forests found in India is rarely seen in other countries. Minor Forest Produce supports livelihood of well over 27 crore people in our

country. Forests have high medicinal value too. In India, only 15 per cent of medicinal plants are cultivated while 85 per cent are collected from forests and other natural habitats.

Dear officers

India is giving special attention to the rights of forest dwelling communities. The symbiotic relationship of the forest dwellers including tribal communities, with the forests is now widely recognised and factored in our development choices.

It is your responsibility to make these communities aware of their rights and duties towards conservation and protection of bio-diversity. Wide ranging reforms are underway for effective participatory management and improved access to more efficient market systems for major and minor produce.

Dear officers

These days we hear about many large forest fires in various parts of India and the world. We have a big challenge of not just conserving the forests but dealing with climate change. Today we have new technologies and concepts of urban forestry, forest risk mitigation, data driven forest management and climate-smart forest economies.

You should innovate and come out with new methods for sustainable management of India's forest resources. You must also play an effective role in protecting our forests from illegal activities which have negative economic and environmental impact.

Dear officers

There is another very interesting aspect. Forests have been a source of inspiration for world's greatest poets. Therefore, the forests make literary contribution too!! They provide respite from noise of the concrete jungles into the natural beauty of deep woods and soothing sounds of rustling leaves, bird-songs and the flowing water of the cascade. Our great saints also got enlightenment in the deep silence of the dense forests.

I must say that you are very privileged to have got the opportunity to take care of our forest wealth and the human and wildlife species

dependent on them. Forests are essential for the social, cultural and economic development of the country. We must keep our forests alive and healthy. Development is a must and so is sustainability.

Dear young officers

It gives me great pleasure to know that more women are now joining forest services. The 'green queens' as they are called, have proved themselves in the physically demanding arena and they provide inspiration to young women across the country to become forest officers.

Our forest officers have been doing great job as conservators and guardians of nature. But with the changing environment and development landscape, your role and the expectations from you, have increased. I am sure you will live up to the rising expectations.

Nature has given us bountiful presents and it is the duty of each one of us to be sensitive and responsible towards the environment. We have to gift our future generations, regenerated natural resources and a beautiful country with sustainable ecosystems.

I convey my best wishes for your bright future and a fruitful career.

Thank you,

Jai Hind!