

**SPEECH BY HER EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRIMATI PRATIBHA DEVISINGH PATIL, AT THE 2ND CONVOCATION OF SHER-I-KASHMIR UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY**

**Jammu, 26th May 2008**

Faculty Members and Students,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to participate in the 2nd Convocation of the Sher-i-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Jammu. I would like to compliment all of you - the Governor, the Chief Minister, the Vice Chancellor, Members of the faculty, the Professors and the students - for the impressive strides that the University has made since its establishment in 1999. The campus has become a symbol of excellence in the field of agriculture research and development. I extend my good wishes to the students who have been conferred their degrees today. I am confident that with the knowledge gained in this institute of higher learning, you will contribute to the development of the agricultural sector of the country, to the welfare of the farming community and to the overall well being of the people of the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

At the outset, I would like to say that I am delighted to be in the historic city of Jammu. It is said that this city was founded when Rajah Jambhu Lochan, while on a hunting expedition crossed the River Tawi and discovered a tiger and a goat drinking from the same tank. When he queried from his aides about this rather unusual sight, they are believed to have explained to him that the soil of the place excelled in virtue and for that reason no living creature bore enmity against another. The people of this city are the inheritors of this remarkable tradition of living together in peace and harmony. It is a matter of pride that this heritage has been kept alive. As a nation, we commend your approach of accommodation and pluralism.

I thought I would use this occasion to share some thoughts on the agricultural situation in our country as well as in the State of Jammu and Kashmir and what we need to do in this area in the future.

In the 1960s when India's import of foodgrains reached an alarming proportion, a new agricultural strategy was adopted in the country. Barriers in the yield of wheat were broken. This dramatic breakthrough called the Green Revolution, made our country self-sufficient in food. However, today, the world is faced with a situation of increased demand and a shortage in the supply of foodgrains, resulting in a spiraling of foodgrain prices and also possibly a difficult global food situation. This is an urgent challenge of our times. A second Green Revolution that will enhance agriculture productivity as also adopt new technologies for the optimum utilization of agricultural produce must be undertaken. Pandit Nehru, our first Prime Minister had, more than half a century ago, remarked "Everything can wait, but not agriculture". Today, this impulse is of special relevance globally, as we are at a critical juncture striving to achieve food security and to eradicate hunger and poverty from our planet.

For increased productivity in agriculture, we will need to act on many fronts and in an integrated manner. We need to take action on better management of water resources, better quality of seeds, scientific farming practices, rational use of fertilizers, integrated pest management and agricultural diversification. Since they are all inter-related, a co-ordinated approach is necessary. Growth in productivity, inter-alia, is a function of the availability of high yielding varieties suited to the agro-climatic conditions of the region and regular seed replacement mechanisms. Farmers need support and advice on such matters. We also need to look at advances in bio-technology to develop crops which may be more suited to water stress conditions and also more resistant to pests. New approaches to plant nutrition and other cropping practices offer potential for increase in agricultural productivity. Our scientists and our research community need to work towards the concept of sustainable agriculture. At all times we must strive to ensure that our farmers are sufficiently aware of what is needed to reap maximum benefit from the new technologies.

I have, therefore, always encouraged Agricultural Universities to enhance their research work and put in place a system by which lab-to-field exchange of knowledge is done in a faster and more effective manner. I appreciate the efforts of the Sher-i-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology to systematize research activities and to intensify scientist-farmer interaction. I am glad to know that the final year students of Bachelor of Sciences of this University are placed in rural areas for one semester. Similarly, the setting up of the Information Training Centre in the University and linking it to 21 locations in villages for capacity building purposes, as is being done by this University, is a useful exercise and the University could consider expanding the coverage. Similar best practices should be exchanged between the Agricultural Universities in the country.

India ranks second in the world in food production. However, due to the lack of post harvest technology, infrastructure and storage facilities, there are huge losses of agricultural produce. I am given to understand that in India, we are wasting more than what many other countries are able to produce. It is important that Universities engage in evolving new scientific methods for post-harvest operations, proper storage facilities and create value addition and food processing units close to production centres in rural areas. The development of "Leh Berry", a fruit product in the Field Research Laboratory at Leh is an example of a successful value addition food processing venture.

In Jammu and Kashmir, agriculture is pivotal to the economy. It contributes more than 50 percent to the net domestic product of the State and is the main source of livelihood for around 80 percent of the population. It is, therefore, agriculture that has the potential not only to revitalize the economy of the State, but also to bring about greater social inclusion and sustainable development even while preserving the unique cultural and religious heritage of the State.

Specifically, Jammu and Kashmir with its rich soil and unique climate has vast potential for horticulture and floriculture. One of the thrust areas for Jammu and Kashmir in the 11th Five Year Plan is horticulture. I understand that the State proposes to promote

horticulture through measures like availability of institutional credit facilities, bringing more area under improved horticulture crops, replacing the aged and decaying plants by new ones and encouraging grading of fruit. The University should contribute to this mission.

The State is also blessed with forests that have a range of bio-diversity and are a treasure house for medicinal and aromatic plants, in addition, its climatic conditions suit saffron cultivation. There is immense scope for the possibility of value addition to fruits, herbs and medicinal plants on a commercial scale. The focus on these areas of agriculture would boost the economy of the State and of its rural economy. The Sher-i-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology should encourage research in this field.

Women play a very important role in agricultural production. The contribution of women is very high in the farm sector as they are involved in the majority of farm operations. Agricultural universities should suggest improved implements and equipments for farm women to make their strenuous task a little easier. In Jammu and Kashmir, floriculture, sericulture and livestock could be sectors for providing employment opportunities to women. Universities should put in place schemes that enhance skill development of women and that could give them employment opportunities.

Knowledge is a powerful agent of change. The creation and application of new knowledge has contributed to the growth of societies, economies, agriculture and thereby to the welfare of the people. I heartily congratulate Dr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia for the degree of Doctor of Science Honoris Cause, conferred on him today. He is an eminent economist of our country and has made outstanding contributions for which he deserves all compliments. I also congratulate Dr. Amrit Lal Chaudhary and Dr. Mangala Rai for the degrees of Doctor of Science Honoris Causa conferred on them. I am confident that the agricultural scientists who have received their degrees today would take it as a mission to transform the agriculture scenario through innovative and new cutting edge technologies. Through your dedicated support, it would be possible for the nation to progress as well as to bring happiness to millions of farmers.

I wish all of you the very best in life.

Thank you.

JAI HIND