

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI RAM NATH
KOVIND ON THE OCCASION OF MEETING WITH INDIAN
FOREST SERVICE PROBATIONERS OF THE 2016-18 COURSE**

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It is a great pleasure for me to be among you today. I welcome you to Rashtrapati Bhavan and congratulate you on being successful in such a tough and competitive exam.

You have chosen a very noble profession. Forests have always been special to Indian ethos and culture. Our civilisation has derived its intellectual and spiritual strength from forests. These forests, therefore, are not merely a resource but they also cover the cultural, spiritual and intellectual heritage of the country.

The onus of protecting this heritage is now on you. On you lies the responsibility of ensuring environmental security, accommodating the sustainable development needs of the country.

In the past few decades, the world has woken up to threats to the very survival of humankind due to environmental degradation, depletion in forest cover and above all global warming leading to climate change. That is why the environment has become a key

concern for the 21st century. And forests are an integral part of the solution.

As you are aware, India has emerged as a global leader in handling complex climate change issues. Our national forest policy envisages 33 per cent of the land mass should be under forest cover. You have to find ways and means to enrich the natural forests, and facilitate bringing non-forest areas under tree cover.

Forests are a potential carbon sink. They could help us reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and the threat of global warming. Our country has set a target to sequester an additional 2.5 to 3 billion tons of carbon in our forests by 2030.

Forests can also help fight the adverse impact of climate change.

- Mangrove forests protect coastal areas from cyclones and tsunamis
- Forests on the hill slopes protect the soil and prevent landslides and flash floods
- Healthy watersheds having good forest cover insulate areas from droughts and increase agricultural productivity

Millions of very poor people, including tribals, live in and around the forests of our country. We need to be sensitive to their basic requirements of food, fuelwood, fodder and such small needs. These are simple and hardworking people and look up to you for guidance and reassurance. Please treat them as your partners in management and not as intruders.

Our country has adopted the joint forest management model, which is based on the “care and share” principle. It envisages a participatory approach, involving local people and communities in the management of forests. You just cannot accomplish the task entrusted to you without involving these people and communities.

You have joined a public service and are the nation’s soldiers in an important area of environmental and ecological conservation. Discharge your duties fairly, without fear, with honesty, and in such a way that your actions benefit the nation and common citizens as a whole.

India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world and we have set ourselves stiff targets. You have to strike a balance between conservation needs and development requirements. Your job is not to pose problems but to provide solutions.

Forestry is a challenging profession. It was an exclusive domain of men till recent times but thankfully that has changed. It is heartening that more and more lady officers are opting to join the Indian Forest Service.

I sincerely hope the lady officers will bring about a meaningful change due to their hard work and dedication. Lady forest officers will not only be able to correct the gender distortion, they will also bring a fresh outlook to the working of your department. This is a welcome development for the country.

I wish you a long and fulfilling career.

JAI HIND