

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI RAM NATH
KOVIND AT THE PRESENTATION OF NATIONAL SAFETY
AWARDS (MINES) 2013 AND 2014**

Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi: August 17, 2017

It gives me immense pleasure to be amid you today to felicitate the award winners of the National Safety Awards (Mines) for the years 2013 and 2014. I congratulate every individual mine and mining company that has won an award for achieving high standards of performance in the area of mine safety.

Safety of workers in the field of mining is non-negotiable and of absolute importance. Yet, meeting required safety standards is not easy and calls for achieving high professional standards.

These awards, instituted by the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment in the year 1983, are a token of appreciation and recognition of those mines and mining companies that have stood out for their record of safety.

Minerals are a valuable natural resource providing vital raw material for infrastructure, capital goods and basic industries. They are critical for India's economic development. And the extraction and management of minerals has to be integrated into our overall strategy for nation building.

India is endowed with an impressive mineral wealth. Today, the mineral sector contributes 2.6 per cent of our national GDP and provides direct

employment to over one million people on a daily average basis, and helps the lives of their families. In recent decades, the Indian mining industry has progressed appreciably in production and productivity through intensive mechanisation and adoption of new technology.

Never before in its long history has the Indian mining industry experienced such revolutionary change, at such an accelerated pace.

It is crucial that safety norms for mining workers and mining operations keep pace. In this regard, I am happy to note that legislative measures as well as concepts of “Self-regulation”, “Workers’ Participation in Safety Management”, and “Safety Management Systems” have come to be institutionalised in the mining industry. There has been a steady decline in fatality rates, and this needs to be recognised.

Yet, we are still some distance from our goal of “Zero Harm”. In fact safety issues and complexities have compounded with the increased scale of mining operations and their extension to adverse geo-mining conditions. The Indian mining industry is standing at the threshold of change. The balance between greater productivity and profit margins and the safety of workers is vital. **Human safety and lives must always come first. They are always the priority.**

For this we have to move even more strongly to a “culture of prevention” from a “culture of reaction”. Safety protocols and sensitisation on global best practices should be adopted in **every mine and every mining enterprise**. It should begin even earlier in our mining and engineering

institutes – such as the Indian School of Mining in Dhanbad (IIT-ISM), the other Indian Institutes of Technology, the National Institutes of Technology and other institutions. Education on best-in-class safety practices should be a compulsory part of the curriculum and on-ground training experience of students.

The safety practices of the award winning mines from today's event should be case studies for students of mining engineering and management. Students should also visit such mines as part of their familiarisation programmes. Unique safety features introduced by the award winning mines should be highlighted by relevant authorities and universally adopted, as may be applicable.

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) performance challenges that the mining industry faces are related to an ever-changing environment – be it at the mine level or at the business level. Standardisation of OHS programs across the company, effective enterprise-wide communication tools, enhanced productivity issues and expectations of society remain major areas to be addressed.

I am happy to note that the Directorate General of Mines Safety has taken a number of steps and initiatives to improve safety, as well as health and welfare of persons working in mines. **Here, I would urge mining companies to design enlightened policies to give back to workers and families of workers, to the local community and to larger society.**

The availability of Corporate Social Responsibility funds can help in this effort – but more than money, there is need for the right intention and a focused approach. For example, the health of workers and their families, particularly the risk of TB or of silicosis, which is an incurable lung disease, remains a challenge. I am happy to note that the Directorate General Mines Safety has taken a number of initiatives this regard.

Control and prevention of such diseases also falls within the ambit of worker safety. Meeting the challenge of TB or of silicosis and organising blood donation camps among workers and their families should be encouraged. **The shortage of blood in times of accidents and emergencies should be anticipated and the mining community must prepare itself for any eventuality.**

Further steps should also be taken to minimise the adverse impact of mining on the health of the surrounding community. This is the era of green consciousness – mining too should keep it on top priority.

Mining activities inherently involve various risks. If not addressed in time, these may have serious consequences, including disasters that put lives at risk. Keeping this in view, a risk-based inspection system has been introduced through the Shram Suvidha Portal. Mines are selected for inspection based on perceived risk, so that mines with a higher risk are inspected well in time.

In spite of best efforts, accidents can and do occur. To reduce the impact of such accidents and disasters, and to rescue trapped persons, emergency

preparedness is the key. The Crisis Management Plan of the Government of India addresses this issue of preparedness.

The Directorate General of Mines Safety, being the technical wing of the Ministry of Labour and Employment, takes all follow-on steps, like sensitising mine managements, district administrations, rescue services and State Disaster Response Forces by conducting mock drills at mines. Individual mines must go beyond government norms and regulations and institutionalise such a safety culture in their operations. Self-regulation by the mining industry is desirable and indeed preferable.

I strongly believe that the mining fraternity in our country - industry, government, business, academics and researchers - is ready to take up these multiple challenges and manage such change responsibly. This will make the mining sector a secure work place as well as a powerful driver of growth and development in the Indian economy.

I am confident that the National Safety Award in Mines will continue to be an excellent motivator for upholding safety and welfare standards in the mines of our country. And in equipping each mine worker to be a nation builder.

Thank You

Jai Hind