

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION OF CALL ON BY THE INDIAN FOREST
SERVICE PROBATIONERS**

Rashtrapati Bhavan, July 23, 2019

1. I am happy to be among all of you today and I welcome you to Rashtrapati Bhavan. You have joined a service and a profession that plays a key role in the management of our ecological resources and forests. All of you have worked very hard to join the Indian Forest Service and I congratulate you as well as your families on your success.
2. Your service is unique as its fundamental ‘call for action’ falls in the very genesis of life as we know it. You are joining a service that has been at the forefront of scientific management of nature, forests and wildlife, and that has a rich legacy.
3. We Indians have age-old links to our forests. Our civilisation has derived its intellectual and spiritual strength from forests. For us, forests are not merely a resource but they form part of our cultural, spiritual and intellectual heritage. Yet, we must ponder whether we give our forests the due protection, respect and care that they deserve. We need to do this not for the sake of forests but for our sake and the sake of life on our planet.
4. Two key ingredients that contribute to a nation’s power are its natural and human resources. In natural resources, India ranks among the top mega-diverse countries of the world. Its 10 bio-geographic zones and 16 climatic forest types represent a wide spectrum of natural ecosystems. India’s biological resources are not only economically important, they also bring invaluable ecological benefits.

5. Today, we are more aware than ever about the major threats posed by environmental degradation, depletion in forest cover, and above all global warming leading to climate change. We are witnessing heat waves, rise in temperature and sea-levels, flooding, melting glaciers, change in weather patterns, coral reef bleaching, and so on. These are signs of a mighty challenge posed to entire humanity. We need to act now, with all seriousness and with the highest intent. And forests are an integral part of the solution.

6. Earlier this month, a research paper was published in the journal 'Science'. It suggests that if global forested area is increased by one-third, it could help mitigate two-thirds of the carbon that has been emitted since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. We also know that watersheds with good forest cover insulate areas from droughts and enhance productivity of agriculture. Wetlands protect coastal areas from cyclones and tsunamis, protect our water resources and support rich flora and fauna. Grasslands support variety of animal species, prevent floods and are important for rural economy and livestock. And forests on the hill slopes protect the soil and prevent landslides and flash floods.

Dear Officer Trainees

7. The Government of India and the state governments are putting in considerable efforts to protect the forest wealth of our country and increase green cover. However, sustainability and success of ecological restoration and conservation lies in mass mobilisation. A large number of poor people, including tribals, live in and around the forests of our country. It is through forests that they fulfil their basic needs of food and fodder. These people are simple and hardworking - and they are very wise. They respect forests as part of their traditions and beliefs. Any measures to protect forests should be sensitive to the basic needs of these people and involve them as partners. These communities can be your ears and eyes

against poaching and illegal logging. You need to guide them and reassure them about their forest rights and their safety.

8. A spirit of partnership is in fact the thrust of the joint forest management model that we have adopted. It envisages working with local people and communities in the management of forests. Linking livelihood opportunities with conservation efforts is important for ensuring effective participation of local people. Your programmes must be linked with the livelihood needs of the local population, improving the resource base that is continuously under threat. Once people and communities are involved in forest management efforts, the solutions you seek shall become more sustainable and effective.
9. India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world and we have set ourselves targets for rapid economic progress. However, let there be no confusion. What we seek is sustainable development. Balancing economic growth and conservation requires leadership, vision, knowledge and ingenuity. I am confident that all of you have the necessary motivation, skills and values to achieve that fine balance.
10. All of you are young officers joining an important profession. Your actions and your work will leave an imprint for generations to come and influence how our civilisation evolves. As bearers of public trust, discharge your duties with utmost diligence, honesty and integrity. Very often you will work in the midst of common people, tribals and communities. Always be sensitive and compassionate towards them and their problems. That is the hallmark of a good civil servant. Your success will be judged by the way you conduct yourself in your long career.
11. Once again, I wish you all a long and fulfilling career.

Thank you
Jai Hind!