

Text of Union Environment Minister's Speech at the World Environment Day 2018 Celebrations

Posted On: 05 JUN 2018 7:59PM by PIB Delhi

The following is the text of the speech of Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Dr. Harsh Vardhan, at the World Environment Day 2018 celebrations:

“Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi ji,

My colleagues, Shri Manoj Sinha and Dr. Mahesh Sharma,

My colleague Ministers from various States of India,

Shri Erik Solheim, Executive Director, UN Environment Programme,

Shri C K Mishra

Distinguished members of this esteemed audience present here today.

I feel honoured and delighted to welcome our dynamic and visionary Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji to inaugurate the global celebrations of the World Environment Day 2018. I extend a warm welcome to all the dignitaries and participants gracing this occasion today at Vigyan Bhawan, as well as to all those, who are watching this programme 'Live'.

Indian civilization evolved with love and reverence for environment, forests and rivers, against all sorts of exploitation of nature right from its inception. Indian philosophy and lifestyle have long been rooted in the concept of co-existence with nature. Conservation is ingrained in the Indian ethos, not just in tradition-bound villages, but even in urban areas.

As an environmentally conscious and responsible country, we are extremely pleased to be the global host of the World Environment Day this year. Ever since our government took over, the theme 'Beat Plastic Pollution' has been passionately spearheaded by our beloved Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, through the revolutionary Clean India movement called 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan'.

Friends and colleagues, today, plastic is not the real problem. It is what

we do with it and how we use it. Plastic is a unique and miracle material with crucial applications in the health sector, in generation of clean energy from wind turbines to solar panels, as well as safe food storage. Plastic packaging accounts for around 50% of all plastic waste generated globally, much of which is single use.

The global plastic production is projected to nearly double within a short period of time. Eliminating single-use plastic, both from design chains to our consumer habits, is a critical first step to beat plastic pollution. Once in the environment, plastics don't degrade easily, and eventually find their way into our food chain.

On this occasion of World Environment Day, we join the United Nations in appealing to the governments, industry, communities and individuals globally to come together and explore sustainable alternatives to single-use plastics. These single use plastics are polluting our land and oceans, endangering marine life and impacting human health adversely.

Dear audience, to beat plastic pollution, we need an out-of-the-box approach to designing, producing, using and managing plastic products through solutions that lead to Green Good Behaviour. In India, we have framed comprehensive Plastic and Solid Waste Management Rules, which address all the concerns related to plastics. Also, taking cognizance of the environmental degradation arising from the use of plastics, our government has initiated action to ensure that all public buildings and public universities become free of single-use plastics.

However, for long-term sustainable living, the global community needs to rethink its energy and resource consumption patterns. Our Hon'ble Prime Minister has provided the global leadership to address both these challenges. In March 2018, India hosted the Founding Conference of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) as a common platform for cooperation among solar resource-rich nations. ISA has now transformed into a global inter-governmental organization headquartered in India that is helping us to harness solar energy at prices, which were unimaginable 3 years ago. Also, through the Swachh Bharat Campaign, the waste to wealth movement has gained strength. Today, for a vast and developing country like India he has given a mantra – 'Swachh, Swastha and Sampann Bharat', a clean, healthy and prosperous India - and that is a goal which we all shall pursue relentlessly.'

I am pleased to inform you all that to motivate and involve the masses in environmental protection, we prepared a compendium of Green Good Deeds, which has now been internationally acknowledged. The BRICS Environment Ministers' meeting in Durban, last month, agreed to include Green Good Deeds in its agenda for the next meeting.

On this historic occasion today, we make a solemn pledge that by 2022 we shall eliminate all single use plastics from our beautiful country. Our beloved Prime Minister Shri Modi ji has envisioned a New India by 2022 - an India of our dreams which shall be clean, poverty-free, corruption-free, terrorism-free, casteism-free ... and most of all ... which will be a global superpower. This India of our dreams shall also be single-use plastic free. And, on the personal front, I pledge to henceforth completely do away with single use plastic in my life.

I am convinced that every Indian is interested and anxious to contribute towards protecting our environment. Every citizen has the potential to become a Green Ambassador. It is the Green Social Responsibility of every citizen to preserve the environment. If each and every one of us does at least one Green Good Deed daily as part of our Green Social Responsibility, there will be more than a billion green good deeds accomplished each day across the country.

Ladies and Gentlemen, by hosting the World Environment Day 2018, India reaffirms its commitment to defeat plastic pollution. Governments, industries, and individuals will all have to play a major role in weaning society from its dependence on single-use plastic that continues to be an adversary to our natural environment. There is a need to raise consciousness about the impact plastics have on society and environment and to inform and educate people about alternate materials. I call upon all citizens and in particular, the civil society groups to be crusaders for realizing this goal. There is also an onus on the industry, as part of their green corporate responsibility to ensure that plastics they make are degradable, recyclable or reusable. I also make a fervent appeal to school and college children to take up the leadership of the Beat Plastic Pollution movement. You as Polio Sainiks for many years got us a polio free India.

In the interest of our Mother Earth, let's all strive in spirit and soul to accomplish this pledge to 'Beat Plastic Pollution'.

Namaskar and Jai Hind!"

HK

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