

## **Newer ways of cooperation between countries need to be reimagined to face post COVID challenges: Dr. Harsh Vardhan at IISF**

Union Minister for Science & Technology and Earth Sciences, Health & Family Welfare Dr. Harsh Vardhan underlined that there are several challenges that the world is getting ready to face in the post COVID era, such as climate change, energy, water security, anti-microbial resistance, and it is necessary to reimagine newer ways of cooperation between countries to face these challenges as well as rethink funding of research, at the 6<sup>th</sup> India International Science Festival (IISF 2020).

“IISF is proving to be a very useful forum for information sharing where India can strengthen its base by forging coordination and collaboration with different countries,” Dr. Harsh Vardhan said at the Overseas S&T Ministers & Diplomat Conclave held at IISF 2020 on December 23, 2020.

He added that the presence of so many overseas ministers at the event reinforces the belief that science & technology breaks all barriers and validates the Indian philosophy of ‘Vasudev Kutumbakam’, which reflects our ancient inclusive traditions.

“India shares common past as well as future goals with many of its immediate and extended neighbours, and this has served well to forge an unbreakable bond amongst all of us. We have learned to harness the soft prowess of science & technology as an important pillar of our cooperation in the knowledge economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” he pointed out.

Secretary, Department of Science & Technology Professor Ashutosh Sharma said that the COVID crisis has stimulated innovation and enterprise in India. “A comprehensive mapping of the entire startup ecosystem to identify and support relevant technology solutions ready for scale-up has recognised over 600 startups making innovative solutions. India has emerged as the third-largest ecosystem for technology startups ahead of UK and Israel. “We invite collaborations from all the friendly neighbours in this area,” he added in his address at the conclave.

“The Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST) is facilitating the Indian Science & Technology community to connect with researchers from other countries like Australia, ASEAN, BRICS, Japan, Germany, Portugal, UK, USA, Uzbekistan to find a solution for COVID-19 through joint research projects,” Professor Sharma pointed out. He added that there are a lot of opportunities for the neighbouring countries to collaborate in areas of cutting edge technologies and innovation.

“For Indian science to be globally competitive international collaboration needs to be effectively leveraged. The Ministry of Science & Technology and Earth Sciences are actively cooperating with over 50 countries across the globe, and the present cooperation is driven by a sense of mutual trust and purpose in achieving together high quality and high impact research partnerships,” Professor Sharma stressed.

Minister of Higher Education, Govt of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Dr Abas Basir, spoke about digital innovation, digital ecosystem policies, and about how science, technology and innovation could be a tool to overcome the COVID 19 challenge.

Minister Delegate attached to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State, Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology & Innovation, Royal Government of Cambodia Dr. Chhem Kieth Rethy, said that his government was committed to constantly increase the investment in science & technology in his country and proposed to send students to India for studies.

Union Minister of Education, Myanmar Dr Myo Thein Gyi, in his address, talked about the role of ASEAN India partnership and about furthering hi-tech learning and hi-tech ecosystem between India and Myanmar.

Secretary (Minister) of Science and Technology, Department of Science and Technology, Philippines, Prof. Fortunato T. De La Peña, Minister of Skill Development, Vocational Education, Research Innovation of Sri Lanka Dr. Seetha Arrambepola, Minister of Innovative Development, Uzbekistan, Mr. Ibrokhim Yu. Abdurakhmonov also spoke at the conclave, which was attended by Head, International Bilateral Cooperation, Department of Science and Technology (DST), Mr S. K. Varshney and other dignitaries.

This one day Overseas Minister's and Diplomat's Conclave organised as part of IISF each year provides an excellent opportunity to exchange scientific and technological priorities and challenges with India's key partner countries that can help towards developing a road map of S&T cooperation towards self-reliance and global welfare.



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