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Union Minister of Science and Technology and Earth Sciences Dr. Harsh Vardhan's opening remarks at IISF Ministers Conclave

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Hon. Abdul Latif Roshan, Minister of Higher Education, Afghanistan,

Hon. Yeafesh Osman, Minister of Science and Technology, Bangladesh,

My colleague, Hon. Y. S. Chowdary, Minister of State for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, India,

Secretaries to the Government of India,

Distinguished scientists and technologists,

Members of the Press,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to extend a very warm welcome on behalf of the Government of India and express my heartfelt thanks to the Honourable Ministers from Afghanistan and Bangladesh for their gracious presence in the IISF-2017 and in this special Ministerial conclave. Your presence today reinforces our common belief that science is universal and is not bounded by geo-political boundaries of nations.

India shares a common past with Afghanistan and Bangladesh that has served to forge an unbreakable bond with India. Today while our countries celebrate the different facets of our vibrant relationship bonded by mutual trust and friendship we also need to harness the soft prowess of science and technology as an important pillar of our cooperation in the knowledge economy of the 21st century.

It is universally acknowledged that Science and Technology are essential pre-requisite for the progress of any nation. We all know that the developed nations of the world are advanced because of their scientific knowledge and technological knowhow.

The present government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi firmly believes that science and technology is the bedrock upon which the country relies for its knowledge power, enterprises rely for their success, and the people rely for a better life. This government is therefore fully committed to promote 'science with a human face' that serves the common man and promotes equitable and sustainable development of the country.

India recognizes that science and technology will be the enabling tool to meet the unmet needs of the society and address the global challenges that we all face. We therefore need to leverage more on science and technology to bridge disparities between urban and rural with focus on affordable technologies for inclusive development, economic growth and employment generation. This is a common aspiration and need for all of us here.

We also believe that for Indian science to be globally competitive, India needs to effectively leverage international collaboration.

Excellency's, my Ministry of Science and Technology and Earth Sciences is actively cooperating with 44 countries across the globe. The present cooperation in science and technology is driven by a sense of mutual trust and purpose in achieving together 'high quality' and 'high impact' research partnerships. This cooperation extends to capacity building in the academic research arena as well. In order to create an ecosystem of fundamental research as a pathway for technology development and innovation, our R&D and academic institutions need to be more globally connected to understand and incorporate the best practices. We can leap frog by avoiding pitfalls through our collective learning's and experiences.

Importantly, through our international and bilateral collaborations India has now started to address together, societal grand challenges using the tools of technology and innovation. Today our scientists are collaborating internationally on wide spectrum ranging from basic sciences to mega science discovery programs, trying to invent new vaccines for Zika, TB, Malaria and Dengue, inventing new smart materials solutions for clean energy and climate change mitigation, trying to improve crop productivity; studying the water cycle and weather forecasting including monsoon forecasting and natural disaster prediction and management. New collaborative R&D programs on anti-microbial resistance, cancer research and agriculture for food security have also been launched in partnership with both the developed and developing world.

Ladies and Gentleman,

We recognize that in order to build research excellence and competence, we need to harness, attract and provide opportunities to the best brains in our countries. We have to motivate more young people to take up scientific research as career choice. This is a challenge not only for all of us, but is a problem faced around the world. In fact as developing countries we have an even greater challenge - the world is looking at us as a supplier and source of these young bright minds and fertile brains!

While we have to focus on 'attracting best people for science' but at the same time our cooperation also has to include 'science for benefit of our people'. In other words we need to connect the discovery science to solution science by taking the research out from the laboratory to the people, society and market. This is the need of the hour.

Today scientific research and development is connected with innovation and business. India's inclusive and integrated development path, chartered under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is anchored on enabling technology platforms and knowledge convergence systems. Creating a new ecosystem of innovation and technology led entrepreneurship has become a national movement under the 'Start-up India' initiative. This can provide tools us the tools means for inclusive development and sustainable growth, *Excellency's*, you will see this in action here in the Science park of IIT-Madras where students have turned into entrepreneurs by establishing their own enterprises.

India has always believed in sharing technology with countries facing similar developmental challenges. Going forward, I believe that our cooperation should now start focusing on providing scientific and technological solutions to meet the unmet needs for the common man. The father of our nation Mahatma Gandhi believed that 'appropriate technology' could provide the ways and means for human emancipation from drudgery and poverty.

In the last few yearswe have been successful in launching such programs with Africa. Only last week, in Durban I announced a new program on 'grass root innovation' with my South African counterpart Minister for S&T. Such programs are aimed towards co-development of products through value addition, validation through product deployment and market ready technology transfer with a focus on affordability. We can effectively share open source technologies and ensure IPR protection of our traditional knowledge including agricultural practices. This will help us to collectively develop, affordable accessible and available solutionsof great social impact and relevance.

At a bilateral level India has successfully launched industrial and innovation R&D program with several advanced countries around the globe. You may have already seen some of the co-developed technologies and products which have been displayed in the technology exposition as a part of this Festival. We can certainly share our experiences and learning's in the deployment of science and technology for addressing common sustainable developmental challenges in our region.

Ladies and Gentleman,

I would like to emphasise that for our neighbourhood countries including Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam a unique model of need based entity to entity cooperation has been judiciously adopted. This has been done with the defining perspective to jointly address national needs of these countries through S&T enabled cooperation. For example, with Vietnam a project on leather research and tannery waste treatment, twinning with Bangladesh Institute of Biotechnology, faculty development in computer sciences in Myanmar, urban mapping project using geo-spatial information system for Thailand, and capacity building of Universities in Sri Lanka are being sagaciously implemented. Thus, scientific and technological strength and compatibility has been judiciously harnessed to establish a win-win cooperation model.

In today's Conclave, we therefor look forward to hear from our distinguished guests the science and technology priorities on which they have embarked in their respective countries. This will help us to charter a road map of cooperation with India on a bilateral level that can foster research, education and innovation partnerships. A science and technology partnership through which we should be able to touch the lives of our people, develop human capacity and excellence which in turn can contribute to the knowledge economy of our countries.

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Thank you.

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