



‘Nation Committed to Achieve Land Degradation Neutrality by 2030’: Dr Harsh Vardhan Environment Minister’s Statement on Eve of World Day to Combat Desertification

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Emphasising that the Modi Government is committed to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality by the year 2030, Environment Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan has said that India’s new National Action Programme (NAP) will be finalised after a series of regional consultations and workshops with all relevant stakeholders, keeping in mind our national circumstances and development priorities. In a statement on the eve of World Day to Combat Desertification here today, the Minister said that India is focusing on sustainable land and resource management for livelihood generation at community level for making the local lands healthier and productive for providing a better homeland and a better future to its inhabitants. He emphasised that this year’s slogan, “Our Land. Our Home. Our Future” underlines the central role that productive land can play in turning the growing tide of migrants abandoning their unproductive land into communities and nations that are stable, secure and sustainable in future. The Minister also said that initiatives like the Soil Health Card Scheme, have been launched by the Government to help farmers improve productivity through judicious use of inputs. He added that the Scheme was allotted ₹ 840.52 crore over the last three years, which is 30 times more than the funds devoted to soil research and analysis in the preceding years.

“The Government is also taking a holistic approach towards improving the living standard of its citizens, with Swachhh Bharat Mission, with a dedicated corpus of funds to address concerns over waste disposal, sewage treatment, sanitation – factors which adversely affect the quality of land”, Dr Harsh Vardhan said.

The Minister pointed out that this year, Swarn Jayanti Nature Camp, Bhondsi village of Gurugram, Haryana, has been chosen for the landmark celebration of World Day to Combat Desertification (WDCD). “A large variety of youth-centric outreach and awareness enhancing activities will emphasise on countering the challenges posed by desertification, land degradation and drought will be showcased at the event”, he added.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan said that various schemes have been drawn up to showcase India’s efforts to mitigate concerns over desertification, land degradation and drought problems. He pointed out that Government schemes like ‘Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana’ (Ministry of Agriculture) have witnessed a surge in allotment of funds, with Rs 4750 crore being released in 2016-17, as compared to Rs 3707 crore in 2015-16. “With the rallying call for ‘More Crop Per Drop’ the Government has further strengthened the ‘Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana’ (Ministry of Water Resources) by increasing budget allocation for the years 2014-17 by approximately 22% at Rs 4510.55 crore, as compared to Rs. 3699.45 crore in the previous three years”, the Minister said. He also referred to the allocations under Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (Ministry of Rural Development), the flag bearer scheme for promotion of skill development and livelihood opportunities for people in rural areas has been increased from Rs. 3000 crore in 2016-17 to Rs. 4500 crore in 2017-18, at an increase of 33%. Besides these schemes, the Minister mentioned Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushalya Yojana and Integrated Watershed Management Programme (Ministry of Rural Development), Swachhh Bharat Mission, National Mission for a Green India and National Afforestation Programme (Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change) that have been at the forefront of India’s efforts to mitigate concerns over desertification, land degradation and drought problems. He added that over the years, apart from implementing above programmes, numerous outreach programmes, numerous outreach and awareness activities have also been conducted across the country.

The Minister stated that combating desertification and land degradation is one of the thrust areas identified by this Ministry. ISRO, Ahmedabad, along with 19 concerned partner institutes has carried out an inventory and monitoring of desertification of the entire country using Indian Remote Sensing Satellites data in Geographical Information System (GIS) environment. The Minister said he was happy that Maps and salient findings compiled in the form of an Atlas was released last year on the Desertification event by Environment Ministry at Jodhpur for the benefit of policy makers and planners.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan concluded by saying that the Day is an occasion to remind everyone that desertification can be tackled effectively, that solutions are possible and the key tools to this aim lie in strong community participation and cooperation at all levels.

BACKGROUND TO WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

June 17 has been observed as the ‘World Day to Combat Desertification (WDCD), as United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was adopted in Paris on June 17, 1994 and ratified in December 1996. India became a signatory to UNCCD on October 14, 1994 and ratified it on December 17, 1996. Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is the nodal Ministry for the Convention.

Drawing inspiration from 1972 Stockholm Conference, the world came together in Rio in 1992 to forge an alliance on Biodiversity, Climate Change and Desertification. The Earth Summit resulted in successful adoption of three United Nations Conventions – Framework Convention on Climate Change, Convention in Biological Diversity and Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). World Day to Combat Desertification has been observed since 1995 to promote public awareness about international efforts to combat desertification and the effects of drought collectively. The main objective of UNCCD is to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought and desertification.

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