

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SMT DROUPADI MURMU
AT THE VALEDICTORY CEREMONY OF WORLD FOOD INDIA
2023**

New Delhi, November 5, 2023

I am delighted to be among you for the valedictory session of World Food India (WFI). I offer my greetings to all the delegates and participants from all corners of India and also abroad.

The Ministry of Food Processing Industries must be commended for organising the second edition of WFI, after the first one in 2017. The Ministry aims to make it the largest processed food show of the country and organise it annually. I think WFI will go a long way in making the rich Indian food culture more familiar to the world. This will also prove to be a great platform for micro, small and medium enterprises in this sector to better align themselves with larger domestic and global players.

From a business perspective, India offers an exciting opportunity. Its fast-growing economy offers a large market. Moreover, its rich knowledge base of agricultural and food processing offers lessons for our times. I have in mind millets, which had nourished generations and generations but were getting forgotten in cities and have now been rediscovered. Taking note of their great nutritional potential, the UN declared 2023 as the Year of Millets.

I am told the 2017 edition of WFI attracted a large number of investment commitments, and rupees 22,711 crore of investment has been grounded or completed so far. In this edition too, I am sure, the investor community must have found immense opportunities in our food processing and allied sectors. WFI has the potential to help India become a kitchen to the world.

The event also serves as an ideal platform to showcase India as a sourcing hub for agricultural and food commodities. It can then generate ample opportunities for Indian sellers in the global marketplace.

Innovators and entrepreneurs would have found much opportunities here. They could learn a lot from the women of India too. Women here have innovated in food processing over the centuries, by creating recipes for varieties of jams, pickles and so on. They have also been model entrepreneurs by running small-scale food-related industries from home. I am glad to learn that, during the inaugural session of this event, Prime Minister Narendra Modi-ji proposed to offer assistance in the form of seed capital to more than one lakh members of Self-Help Groups involved in food processing activities.

All cultures have many interesting sayings on the theme of food. We too have many proverbs that say, in essence, we are what we eat. In that case, no amount of attention we pay to this crucial subject is enough. Though this event is concluding today, but I am sure you will carry on the conversations that began here. The interactions over these three days must have led to collaborations.

Dear Friends,

Food, as you know, is a defining characteristic of humankind. Tens of thousands of years ago, when human beings started evolving as a unique species, language and food were among the factors that made them different from their nearest cousins. The shift from foraging to agriculture and from raw food to cooked food was the beginning of civilisation. No wonder, food is invariably the cornerstone of any culture. In India, we take pride in our immense diversity and that is amply reflected in our plates too.

Moreover, just as food helps forge bonds among strangers, it has been food that has historically brought different cultures closer. Fruits and vegetables first grown in one part of the world have over centuries become part of all other parts of the world. Trade in spices and condiments triggered commerce between nations and globalisation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Food remains one of the basic necessities of life for every human being. It is distressing indeed to realise that a substantial number of human beings go to bed on an empty stomach in many parts of the world. This puts a strain on the great economic and technological progress humankind has achieved. It would have been a different matter if the world was not producing enough to feed all. Science has drastically improved yields and promises to even deliver much more. The large-scale prevalence of hunger is not due to the lack of production, but due to the lack of distribution.

Is it also due to the lack of empathy? I don't believe so. During the pandemic, when many people could not earn in order to feed the family,

civil society and religious organisations organised mass kitchens. And I must also mention the Indian Government's initiative for consistently providing free food grains to the poor, apart from the subsidised grains. It was arguably the biggest drive of its kind.

Let me also mention here that we must consider the environmental costs of what we eat. The previous generations did not have to worry on this count, but the time has come when we have to choose our menu in a way that avoids any harm to nature. We need to make conscious decisions to shift away from those foods that add to the problem of climate change and to shift towards the ones that are good for not only our health but also for the health of the planet.

Dear Friends,

At the conclusion of this truly mouth-watering event, I should be offering you something like desserts, and here I am, like a typical Indian host, offering you even more food – food for thought. But then, we also have a tradition of offering packaged meals to our guests for their return journey, and I offer my views on food to you in that spirit.

Let me end by once again congratulating the organisers, participants and also the winners of the WFI awards. My best wishes are with all of you.

Thank you,

Jai Hind!

Jai Bharat!