

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE NATIONAL SEMINAR
ON 'FOOD SAFETY - ROLE OF STANDARDS'**

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1. It is indeed a privilege for me to be present here today at the National Seminar on 'Food Safety – Role of Standards'. I congratulate the Bureau of Indian Standards for taking this initiative to create awareness about food safety and the role of standards in India.

2. Clean, fresh and nutritious food is vital for the physical and mental health of our people. The safety of the food that we eat requires the maintenance of specific standards of hygiene during its preparation and processing. It also requires us to prescribe conditions for proper transportation and marketing of these items before they are consumed. Their storage is, similarly, required to be under safe conditions specified for the different products – which should also be communicated clearly to the consumers. These factors indicate that the establishment and enforcement of standards and guidelines are essential - both for manufacturers as well as for consumers.

3. India has made significant strides over the past decades in food production as well as in exports of food products. India is among the 15 leading exporters of agricultural products in the world. It is noteworthy that in 2010-11, exports of agricultural and allied products registered a robust growth rate of 39.3 per cent. It is

indeed a positive development that manufacturers of food, transporters and all stakeholders in the chain of food supply in our country are becoming increasingly cognisant of the virtues of food safety. More and more of them are voluntarily and consciously adapting traditional approaches to develop innovative systems for food safety management.

4. Globalization of the world economy has also given a significant boost to food trade - and resulted in a paradigm shift in food consumption patterns, production methods and processing technologies. But at the same time, there is a new risk - of faster trans-boundary transfer of microbiological and chemical hazards. This presents a new set of challenges to food safety. These potential risks require robust preventive and curative capacities to be put in place to safeguard the health of our population. The economic cost of poor safety standards can be high - in terms of treatment of food-borne diseases and the direct and indirect economic loss due to rejection or low grading of our products in the international market.

5. For all these reasons, Food Safety has been a key priority for the Government of India. The Food Safety and Standards Act introduced by Government in 2006 is a comprehensive, consolidating statute related to food safety and regulation. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, established under this Act has the

responsibility of protecting and promoting public health through the regulation and supervision of food safety.

6. Distinguished guests, the challenge of meeting the ever growing food requirement of our population calls for major investments and innovation in our agriculture, agri-business and food processing sectors. While up-gradation of suitable technology is essential, safe farming practices, modern breeding techniques should go hand in hand with food related research, duly concentrating on how food safety should be regulated under Indian climatic and other relevant physical and cultural conditions.

7. The Bureau of Indian Standards has an increasingly important role in this effort. I note that the Bureau of Indian Standards has formulated Indian Standards and a number of guidelines on best practices and management systems. In these, they have included Indian standards on Food Retail Management, Good Hygienic Practices, and Good Manufacturing Practices. The Indian Standard on basic requirements for street food vendors is an important step - especially in the context of the significant growth in the street food sector. It has important economic and nutritional implications for our urban populations as street foods are an accessible and affordable option for a sizeable percentage of our working population.

8. We should also be conscious that a substantial majority of our food businesses are small and cottage scale units. They should not be intimidated by the standards that are set for them or find their implementation to be too complex. There must be a channel for addressing their genuine problems and generating practical solutions to these. They should be made aware that these standards are measures that have been taken by Government and regulators are in their own interest. By improving the safety of the food they produce and building food safety systems and capacity, they would increase their own profitability.

9. The importance of consumer education in the prevention of food-borne illness is another universal imperative. When consumers are quality and safety conscious, they are able to complement the efforts of food control agencies in encouraging the food industry to provide good quality and safe food.

10. I am happy to learn that the Bureau of Indian Standards, under the able guidance of Prof. K. V. Thomas, Hon'ble Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, Govt. of India, has organized as many as four seminars for creating awareness about food safety. This outreach by the Bureau of Indian Standards will also be useful in gaining valuable feedback from

consumers and key participants in the food supply industry all over our country.

11. Ladies and Gentlemen, I have no doubt that this seminar will facilitate a purposeful exchange and sharing of information and experiences. It will contribute to enabling our country to be equipped with workable, practical and realistic systems for improving the safety of the food consumed in our country.

12. I would like to convey to the participants in the National Seminar my best wishes. With these words, I, formally inaugurate this Seminar.

Jai Hind