

***Address by President FICCI at the opening Ceremony of
Asia-Africa Agri-Business Forum : Feb 4, 2014, Hotel Kempinski***

Hon. Sri Sharad Pawar, Minister of Agriculture & Food Processing

Sri Rajeev Kher, Secretary, Ministry of Commerce & Industry

Hon. Ministers, Excellences, Dignitaries on the dais

Delegates from Africa and Asia, Ladies and Gentlemen

I welcome you to the **Opening Session** of this special initiative of FICCI in partnership with our Ministries of Commerce & Industry, and Ministry of Agriculture, to focus on “**Unlocking the food belts of Asia and Africa**”.

*We are grateful to Sri Sharad Pawar, Minister of Agriculture for his support, which only underlines the priority our Government attaches to promotion of international co-operation in agriculture and agri-business. I may also remind you that the **Hon. President of India** will be the Chief Guest at the formal inaugural session this afternoon.*

Our Prime Minister - at the Golden Jubilee of Afro-Asian Rural Development Organization in March 2012 - emphasised the need for promoting investment and trade in agriculture between Asia and Africa and called on India to take the lead role. Inspired by this, FICCI and our Government conceptualised this dialogue. We are thrilled with your response and the attendance from 25 countries, representing governments, business and academia.

Agriculture and food processing are the backbone of most economies in Africa and Asia and is central to economic growth and stability, as well as livelihood of our people. It will continue to play an central role in development and poverty alleviation in developing economies, even in an era of economic liberalization and globalization. Estimates suggest that by 2030, agriculture

and agribusiness industry will stand at around US\$ 3 trillion in Africa and almost US\$ 4.5 trillion in Asia. However we cannot be content with estimates. We have to look at new practices and partnerships to multiply growth and make it sustainable. Let me highlight a few opportunities.

- Low, inconsistent use of improved seeds and fertilizers are key factors in low yields. Greater technical partnership can yield wonderful results.
- Based on rich agriculture resources in Africa, we can examine how Indian and Asian companies can form joint ventures for producing food grains, pulses and oil seeds for domestic use in Africa, and export.
- Farm mechanization is an area for partnerships. India has achieved success here and can be a source of agricultural machinery like harvesting, earth moving, tractors and sowing machinery. Indian companies are keen to partner with Asian neighbors and countries in Africa for manufacturing such equipment and other inputs.
- Another opportunity is finance for developing agribusinesses. Various factors limit formal lending to such businesses in Asia and Africa. Lenders, investors and banks can be creative in forming strategic partnerships. In India credit supply has increased greatly through regional rural banks and rural credit cooperatives.
- Upgrading infrastructure is a high priority for jump-starting agribusiness. Major investment areas are irrigation, water conservation and roads. Public-private partnerships can be one interesting way to address this.

- Post-harvest management facilities, distribution frameworks and other facilities like packaging remain a bottleneck. Sharing of Best Practices can provide lessons. Our InfoTech sector can support communities through information hubs and knowledge dissemination at the grassroots.

This 3 day program aims to highlight such opportunities. Dedicated sessions and B2B meetings will facilitate interaction among industry, experts and policymakers. A special ministerial session of agriculture ministers will lay the foundation for agricultural cooperation between our continents.

I welcome you all again to the Forum.

Thank you