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Scientists should communicate with masses: Dr Harsh Vardhan

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"Our biggest challenge is to convince the people that S&T is not only indispensable for achieving Swacch Bharat's objectives, but it is also the cheapest route to it. How many people know that rapid advancements in research have brought down delivery costs? We are at the threshold of a great era and I appeal to scientists to communicate this fact to the masses proactively," remarked Dr Harsh Vardhan.

The Union science and technology minister, who was inaugurating the extension wing of the Department of Biotechnology (DBT)-ICT Center for Energy Biosciences at the Institute of Chemical Technology (ICT) in Mumbai recently, said chemical toilets, solar-power fuelled flushing systems and conversion of municipal and even kitchen waste into biofuels are some of the thrust areas adopted in institutions under the Ministry.

He said, "The very day the Prime Minister announced the Swacch Bharat Campaign, I went to New Delhi Railway Station. Seeing the legacy of decades of indifference to sanitation and public health there, I realised that all the fruits of modern research into the area needs to be marshalled for solving this problem."

In the early days of conversion of municipal waste to fuel, there were problems faced with wet garbage which constitutes the most part of public dumps in India. But now, research to resolve this problem have begun to yield dividends.

Dr Harsh Vardhan announced that in his Parliamentary constituency of Chandni Chowk (Delhi), he has commissioned the installation of solar power-fuelled "intelligent" pumps which have the capability of dispensing 1litre of water each time a toilet bowl is used.

"We have to keep in mind factors like water and energy conservation and limited spaces. It is indeed a matter of national pride that our scientists have accepted this challenge because the Prime Minister's dream has to depend on indigenous technology, not foreign implants," he remarked.

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The ICT is India's premier centre in the specialisation of chemical technology. It was established in 1933 under University of Mumbai and is today regarded as one of the top centres in the world for research and higher education in the field. In recent years it has developed deep experience and cross-disciplinary capacities in advanced energy biosciences. It is already generating and deploying innovations in the important field of bioenergy and biofuels.

The DBT-ICT Centre of Biosciences is now in its second five-year phase. The minister said that it is now diversifying into second and third generation biofuels and biochemical solutions. "These areas are based on handling the diverse kinds of waste available all over India and adding value to the bio- constituents of those wastes with a view to develop them into fuels."

This is not the only institution under the Ministry of Science and Technology which is actively pursuing the "Swacch Bharat" agenda. As an example he pointed to the Nagpur-based National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI).

"They are developing a technology which will make biofuels like biogas by treating solid waste at the community, village and small town levels. This is remarkable because not only will it lead to the decentralisation of solid waste disposal but has the potential to develop a direct interface between rural people and cutting edge science," the Minister said.

Dr Harsh Vardhan visited all the laboratories at the DBT-ICT Centre and also went around the campus of ICT and saw for himself the facilities for research. He was accompanied at the occasion by Vice-Chancellor of the Institute Dr.G.D.Yadav, MD of Godrej Industries Limited Mr. Nadir Godrej, Head of the Centre Dr. Arvind Lali and the Dr.Sangita Kasture from Department of Biotechnology.

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He also interacted with the students, teachers and officials, and complimented the Institute and its faculty and students for maintaining high standards in research and development.

Source: DBT.