

REPUBLIC DAY, 2016

My Dear fellow citizens of Meghalaya,

On this happy and joyous occasion of our 67th Republic Day, it gives me immense pleasure to warmly greet and felicitate all of you. On this day, sixty six years ago, we the people of India, gave to ourselves our own Constitution which seeks to secure to all citizens justice, liberty and equality. Along with this, we had also solemnly resolved to uphold the unity and integrity of our great nation. As a charter of rights and as a guide to action, it is a document that all of us can be proud of.

For most of our young generation who were born after the country attained independence, the struggle for freedom may appear as a distant episode. This Day is also an occasion for us to remember all those great men and women who made immense sacrifices in the struggle for India's freedom. Closer home, we recall the stellar contribution of U Tirot Sing, U Kiang Nangbah and Pa Togan N. Sangma, who led the struggle in opposing the colonial rulers.

Although certain challenges exist, the internal security situation in the State has been, by and large, satisfactory. All the major festivals were celebrated with customary zeal and enthusiasm. The bye-elections to Chokpot Assembly Constituency in June 2015 and Nongstoin Assembly Constituency in November 2015 were conducted peacefully. Similarly, the general elections to the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council in October, 2015 was peaceful, despite agitations by some NGOs and militant organizations.

We must also note that there are some serious concerns, particularly in Garo Hills. This challenge to internal security is being dealt with firmly by our security forces. The State Police, ably supported by the Central Armed Police Forces, are putting in commendable efforts to nab these militant groups and neutralize their activities. Some of our brave police personnel have made supreme sacrifice and laid down their lives while fighting the militants. In this endeavour, support of the Central Government has also been sought. Insurgency and terrorism have widespread networks extending across States and even beyond the national borders. Therefore, a joint and concerted effort on the part of the States and the Centre is essential to overcome this menace.

A multi-pronged approach is being followed by the Government so that the root causes of militancy also get addressed in order to have lasting peace in the region. The Government has kept its doors open for talks with the militant outfits provided they eschew the path of violence. In pursuance of this, the United Achi'k Liberation Army (UALA) came forward to sign the Text of Agreement on the 18th December, 2015 and the Government is now finalizing the modalities to rehabilitate the cadres of the outfit. This is a step in the right direction and will definitely set an example to other outfits to come over ground and join the mainstream.

Efforts are on to resolve the long outstanding issue of inter-State boundary dispute with Assam through discussions at various levels. The situation on the inter-State border has, by and large, remained peaceful. The situation

on the international border with Bangladesh has improved significantly. Following the Protocol signed by the two Prime Ministers, the process of delineating the boundary on the ground is now underway. Meghalaya will retain about 241 acres of adversely possessed land, while Bangladesh will retain about 41 acres of land. Meghalaya, being a border State, can take full advantage of the recent developments leading to closer trade and economic relations between the two countries.

The State Government has taken steps to mobilize additional resources for development through Externally Aided Projects (EAPs). Two important EAPs have already been launched. The Megha Livelihood & Access to Markets' Project focuses on market access development, development of integrated village co-operative societies and knowledge management while the Project on 'Human Capital Development' aims at enhancing the employability of the youth through quality school education and training in vocational skills. Several other EAPs are under active consideration. In respect of core Centrally Sponsored Schemes, the Government of India had recently agreed to provide special dispensation to the North Eastern States by retaining the funding pattern at 90:10 between the Centre and the State.

Supporting small entrepreneurs is essential to help the economy grow and prosper. These were the words used by the Hon'ble Prime Minister during the launch of the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana. The aim of this scheme is to fund the unfunded. We have also launched the scheme in the State and so far about Rs. 47 crore MUDRA loans have been sanctioned.

The Swachh Bharat Mission, which was launched in 2014 has now spread all over the State. Positive steps have been taken by the State Government to increase sanitation coverage and in spreading the message of cleanliness to the public through print and electronic media. Special emphasis has been given to cleanliness of hospitals and other health institutions. The Ganesh Das Hospital, Shillong was awarded a cash incentive of Rs. 50 lakh for this campaign under the National Health Mission. So far, 2,079 villages in the State have been declared as open defecation free (ODF) villages. Along with the rest of the country, the State is gearing up to achieve full sanitation by October 2, 2019. On this occasion, let us also praise the dedication and efforts of the people of Mawlynnong village for earning the acclaim of being the cleanest village in Asia.

Three social security schemes, namely, the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana and Atal Pension Yojana were launched by the Central Government during the year. The Bima Yojana schemes carry attractively low premiums for accident cover and life cover. People in the State have eagerly come forward to take advantage of these schemes.

Social sector schemes for the welfare of women, children and adolescent girls are being continued under various Central schemes. The Meghalaya State Commission for Women and the Meghalaya State Commission for Protection of Child Rights have been taking effective steps to curtail violence against women and to ensure that children in need of care and protection are given due attention. The Chief Minister's Social Assistance Schemes for the Infirm,

Aged and Widows and for Persons with Disabilities with monthly assistance of Rs. 500/- are also being implemented.

The promotion of health care through the network of hospitals, health centres and dispensaries and extension of outreach services to reach the populace of the State is one of the main thrusts of the Government. No effort will be spared to ensure that proper health care delivery services are made available to the people. Implementation of Megha Health Insurance Scheme to cater to the medical needs of the citizens of the State during sickness has commenced and about 3,47,000 households have been enrolled so far.

In the Education Sector, efforts have been made to provide better facilities to schools and educational institutions. To improve the quality of education in the educationally backward Blocks, 9 (nine) Model Schools and 20 (twenty) residential schools are being set up. The Shillong Polytechnic, in addition to existing courses, is now offering 2- year Post Diploma Course in Information Technology. A new B.Ed. college would be starting soon at Jowai. As part of the Government's efforts to make Meghalaya an educational hub, degree engineering colleges are being established at Ampati and Jowai and one college in Shillong is being proposed under Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan.

Skill development programmes to promote gainful employment to the youth have been given high priority and over 20,000 youth have been covered till date. Under the Entrepreneurship Promotion Scheme for Women and Youth, the Government has launched skill development training programme on Zardozi Craft and manufacturing of Meghalaya specific souvenirs / mementos at Shillong and

Ampati.

Meghalaya is one of the few States in the North East to have the Core IT infrastructure in place as envisaged under the National e-Governance Plan. This gives us a strategic advantage to reap early benefits under the Digital India programme of the Government of India. Under the Bharat Net project, the State will be able to provide high-speed broadband connectivity to about 1200 villages by March, 2017.

An important event held in the State was the International Mei Ramew, 2015 (Indigenous Terra Madre) organized by the North East Slow Food and Agro-Biodiversity Society with the support of the State Government during November, 2015. The participants in the event comprised 43 communities from within the country and abroad. The event showcased the indigenous food, local cuisine, eco-tourism, cultural diversity, agro-biodiversity and agro-ecology, amongst others.

In line with the policy towards promotion of safe food, the Government has taken steps to reduce indiscriminate use of chemical pesticides by phasing out all subsidies on inorganic pesticides. These were substituted with new and eco-friendly bio-pesticides, bio-fertilizers, biological control agents and plant growth regulators which are environmentally safe. The Meghalaya Mission Organic scheme aims to promote organic farming in the State. The organic certification programme associated with this Mission will facilitate marketing our organic products through premium national and international outlets.

Efforts have been made to enhance Road connectivity in the State by connecting unconnected villages apart from upgradation of existing roads and development of National Highways. The Government is leveraging upon different programmes of the Central Government to mobilise additional resources to finance the road construction projects.

Substantial investments made over the years in the Power sector have stabilised the power scenario in the State. The commissioning of the Agia-Nangalbibra transmission line has provided an alternative source of power to the Garo Hills. In December, 2015, the third Sub-station in Garo Hills at Mendipathar was commissioned, thus fulfilling a long cherished dream of the people.

Being abundantly blessed with nature in all its bounty, the State has generated interest among potential tourists from within the country and abroad. As a pollution-free and eco-friendly industry capable of generating employment opportunities to the people, Tourism holds a promising future. With the continuous efforts of the Government, Meghalaya has evolved as one of the most preferred tourist destinations in the North East. Promotion of Meghalaya as a film shooting destination is also being encouraged.

A landmark event this year would be the 12th edition of the South Asian Games being co-hosted by Meghalaya. It is indeed a matter of great honour that Shillong will be hosting 8 (eight) sports disciplines of Archery, Badminton, Boxing, Judo, Table Tennis, Taekwondo, Women's Football, and Wuchu from the 6th to 16th February, 2016. India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka will participate in this international event.

It has been the endeavour of the Government to project Meghalaya as a progressive, liberal and forward-looking State, and as an attractive destination for investments. A large number of national level institutions of excellence have been set up in the State in recent years. Cultural and sports events of national and international levels are being held; mainstream films are being shot; symposia and conferences are being organised; and potential investors are showing keen interest in doing business here. In today's closely connected world, perceptions created about a place and its people has become very important. It is therefore important for all of us to ensure that we do not resort to or encourage any activities or practices that will adversely impact the perception and image of the State.

"Rich natural resources combined with talent of our youth gives our North-East the potential to play a key role in our development journey. India will not develop till the North-East develops" These are the words of our Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi. We can thus be assured of the full backing of the Centre in our development efforts. I would like to conclude here by appealing to all the citizens of the State to work in unison to make Meghalaya a land of peace and prosperity that all of us can be proud of. Let us remind ourselves, today, that growth and development cannot take place in an atmosphere of uncertainty and turmoil. Let us therefore join hands to face the challenges of tomorrow through a common commitment towards peace and social justice as enshrined in our Constitution.

Once again I wish you all a Happy Republic Day!

KHUBLE! MITHELA!! JAIHIND!!!