

**ADDRESS BY HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MEGHALAYA
ON THE OCCASION OF REPUBLIC DAY-2021 AT
POLO GROUND, SHILLONG**

My dear fellow citizens of Meghalaya, on the occasion of the 72nd Republic Day, I convey my heart-felt greetings to all of you.

1. On this Day, we salute the values of our democracy and reaffirm our commitment to the constitutional values of liberty, fraternity and equality. Let us also pay homage to the freedom fighters who fought for our country's independence. Let us remember, with reverence, the founding fathers of our republic and the makers of our constitution- Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. We also remember Meghalaya's own patriots, U Tirot Sing, U Kiang Nangbah, Pa Togan N. Sangma and many other unsung heroes. I would also like to greet the members of the Armed Forces, Paramilitary forces and the Police force.

2. The overall law and order situation in the State continues to be peaceful. We began this decade with a vision and a promise of the Meghalayan Decade. A decade that would witness Meghalaya progressing to be among the Top 10 Indian states within the next 10 years, both in terms of per capita income and achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. The government, on multiple occasions has already laid out the overall developmental paradigm for the short, medium and the long terms to improve the well-being of each and every citizen of Meghalaya. The State Government is committed to ensure welfare of the tribal and non-tribal residents in the State to ensure peace, harmony and overall development of the State.

3. To realize the vision, the government began in earnest with various schemes and programs. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, I am happy to say that most of our initiatives are on track. The greatest achievement, however, during the last year has been the management of COVID-19 pandemic itself. Meghalaya continues to be amongst the states with the lowest number of active cases and case fatality rates. The Government's efforts in dealing with the pandemic have been appreciated nationally and even by the World Health Organization.

4. I thank our frontline workers including doctors, healthstaff, police, municipal staff and district administrations who have been working tirelessly over the last 10 months. The civil society, including traditional institutions like local durbars and nokmas, village committees, youth organizations, women's groups and media have played a crucial role by supporting the Government in managing the pandemic effectively.

5. With the development of two made-in-India vaccines, our country has proved its mettle once again as the 'Pharmacy of the World'. As Indians, we stand proud and I would like to congratulate the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, on behalf of all the citizens of Meghalaya, for this monumental achievement. The first dose of the vaccine was administered to 518 people in the State on the 16th of January. The government intends to vaccinate about 28,000 health workers in the first phase of vaccination.

6. Friends, the Government launched the Restart Meghalaya Mission as a concerted response to the economic slowdown caused by the COVID 19 pandemic. We made a commitment to spend Rs.14,515 Cr. on a range of developmental activities over the next three years. I am happy to inform you that many of these programs are being well implemented. This Government has, over the last three years, given an unprecedented focus toward improving infrastructure.

7. In the roads sector, expansion and rehabilitation work has begun on some of the important major district roads with an investment of Rs. 386 Crore under the World bank funded Integrated Transport Project. DPRs for another 600 Cr. of roads and bridges for the same project are being prepared. In addition to these, the Government has already tendered six major roads worth Rs. 580 Cr. under the State Schemes. The construction of about 2,561 kms. of PMGSY roads, costing about Rs. 1,950 Crore is underway across the State and implementation is being closely monitored.

8. Drinking water supply is another major focus of the Government. The implementation of the Jal Jeevan Mission is being prioritized. All efforts are being made for installation of Functional Household Tap Connection at every rural household by December, 2022 against the national target of December, 2024. In addition, new water supply schemes are being taken up. Recently, the Greater Baghmara Water Supply Scheme has been sanctioned with an estimated cost of about Rs. 63.5 Cr. Further, the Government has now allocated funds for Nongstoin Water Supply Scheme and the Greater Shillong Water Supply Scheme, both of which were dormant for many years.

9. In the Power Sector, the State Government has recently allowed the Meghalaya Power Distribution Company Limited to avail a loan of Rs.1346 Cr. to clear all outstanding liabilities to the different generation companies. This reform, under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan will revive the MePDCL and improve the power distribution situation in the State. The Meghalaya Power Distribution Sector Improvement Project with funding support from ADB has also been rolled out. Rs. 980 Cr. are being spent under this project for installation of Smart Meters and for strengthening the power distribution network.

10. Sports infrastructure is critical to enable our youth to excel and for the State to host national and international events. The construction of the P. A. Sangma Integrated Sports Complex at Tura, being built at a cost of Rs. 125 Cr. has begun. Works at the J.N. Stadium in Shillong, being built at a cost of Rs.150 Cr, will begin soon. The works for the Wahiajer Stadium, West Jaintia Hills amounting to Rs. 24 Cr. have been tendered out. The Government has also started the process for creation of durable rural sports infrastructure across the State, with an investment of about Rs.75 Cr.

11. On health infrastructure, complete renovation of 659 health facilities in the state is being taken under the World Bank funded 'Meghalaya Health System Strengthening Project.' In the last few months, 40 Health sub-Centres have been powered with Solar power and energy efficient appliances.

12. In the Education Sector, a comprehensive plan for repair and upgradation of infrastructure at all the primary and secondary schools of the State has been approved. For this year, an amount of Rs. 100 Cr. has been earmarked and construction works will begin soon. The up-gradation and improvement of degree colleges at Baghmara, Sohra and Williamnagar have begun with an investment of Rs. 12 Crores each.

13. The second pillar in the State's development strategy is primary sector rejuvenation, with a goal to double the farmers incomes. In the last year, the process of mobilization of Farmer Producer Groups has begun. The collectivization of farmers into producer groups will enable them to systematically improve production, productivity and marketing of their produce. A corpus fund of Rs. 21 Cr. to provide interest free loans to the Producer Groups has been created. About 1,700 Farmer Producer Groups having a membership of over 24,800 farmers have been formed. Another 3,000 groups are targeted to be formed by the end of 2021 .

14. Missions for the promotion of Lakadong turmeric, Jackfruit, Mushroom and Aromatic plants continue to be implemented. The piggery mission has been operationalized. The first tranche of zero interest loans of Rs. 15 Cr have already been disbursed to 85 Cooperative Societies. A 'Centre of Excellence' for citrus fruits at Dawagre, East Garo Hills is being set up in collaboration with the Embassy of Israel.

15. Our State continues to be a top performer in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes. Almost Rs. 1,200 Cr. have already been spent in the last 9 months and the total expenditure by the end of this financial year is expected to touch Rs. 1,600 Crores. This will translate into an average direct annual income of about Rs. 17,000 to every registered rural household in the State.

16. The Government is very committed to the empowerment of women. About 26,000 Self Help Groups of women have been formed so far, out of which about 22,000 were formed in the last 2.5 years. Out of the Rs.117 Crores that have been released to these SHGs so far, Rs. 105 Crore has been released during the tenure of this Government.

17. The next set of achievements under the Restart Meghalaya Mission have been in the promotion of Entrepreneurship in the state. Under the State's flagship enterprise promotion program called PRIME, Hubs are being set up across the State. These Hubs will be spaces for entrepreneurs to meet, exchange ideas and to be mentored and skilled. The Shillong and Tura PRIME Hubs have now become vibrant spaces. The first rural PRIME Hub was inaugurated at Songsak, East Garo Hills. Under the program, financial support in the form of startup grants and zero interest scale up loans are being provided to entrepreneurs focusing on the sectors of food processing, art, craft and hospitality services.

18. The Government realizes that the Tourism Sector has the largest growth potential for the State. The pandemic has disrupted the sector globally. To provide relief to the hotel industry, an amount of Rs.10 Cr. has been sanctioned. To restart and revive the

tourism sector, an externally aided project supported by New Development Bank for Rs. 732 Cr. has been approved. The project components include creation of tourism Infrastructure in both rural and urban areas, development of new tourism circuits in West Khasi Hills, South West Khasi Hills and Garo Hills, branding the State systematically through festivals and campaigns and upskilling the tourism stakeholders. The Delhi-Shillong Direct Flight has become operational, fulfilling a long cherished dream of direct air connectivity with the national capital. This improved connectivity, coupled with the investments being made, will bring about a fundamental shift in the Tourism sector and position the State as a preferred high-value sustainable tourism destination in the next 2-3 years.

19. The State has opened for Tourism in December 2020 with protocols for safety and sustainability in place. The facilitation centre at Umling, Ri-Bhoi has been operationalized to streamline the entry of people to the State. The facilitation centres at Mendipathar and Bajengdoba in North Garo Hills and Ratacherra in East Jaintia Hills will also be functional soon.

20. Youth comprises almost 31 % of the State's population and to cater to their needs and aspirations, the government is formulating a comprehensive State Youth Policy. The policy will lay out a clear framework to enable the youth to realise their full potential.

21. My dear citizens, the key to our future is sustainable management of our natural resources with water at the core. Despite being the rainiest place on the planet and having over 75% of forest cover, water scarcity remains an acute problem in the State. Meghalaya already has a comprehensive 'State Water Policy' and will soon be launching the 'Meghalaya Water Mission' to focus on all water related issues in a comprehensive manner.

22. I would also like to take this opportunity to praise the systemic and consistent governance reforms that are being undertaken by the government. The Meghalaya Right to Public Services Act has been enacted and the Auto Renewal and Centralised Inspection System has been operationalized. The localization of the UN mandated Sustainable Development Goals are also close to completion. It is a validation of all these efforts that the state was recently recognized as the 2nd best governed Small State in the Public Affairs Index released by the Public Affairs Centre.

23. Friends, before I conclude, I would once again thank all the health and frontline workers and the communities who have all contributed to the fight against COVID-19. Despite the pandemic, we have been making strides across various sectors to ensure the overall development of the State. On this day, Let us pledge to rededicate ourselves to work hard, selflessly and with utmost sincerity. Let us resolve to preserve and strengthen the unity and integrity of this great country and uphold the constitutional values.

KHUBLEI : JAI HIND: MITELA