



Chief Minister's Speech

Independence Day

15th August 2026

My Dear Citizens,

1. It fills my heart with immense pride to greet you on this Independence Day - the ninth consecutive time that I have this honour. As we raise our flag under the open skies of our beautiful Meghalaya, we remember the visionaries who gave us a free India - Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. We also honour the brave sons of our soil - U Tirot Sing, U Kiang Nangbah and Pa Togan Sangma. Today is the day to show our gratitude to the defence forces, paramilitary and police, who protect our freedom every single day. This year, I am delighted to inform that our Meghalaya Police received the President's Police Colour, one of the highest honours bestowed upon a police force in India, recognizing its disciplined, professional and citizen-friendly service.
2. Meghalaya has received many national and international recognitions in the recent past. One such recognition is for the living root bridges to be India's nomination for the UNESCO World Heritage List, 2026. These bridges took years to build. Our ancestors guided the roots of the Ficus elastica trees across streams, patiently, year after year, until those roots grew strong enough to carry the weight of generations. Friends, this philosophy of perseverance, persistence and possibility has guided the work of the State Government over the last eight years. Visible outcomes of this work can be seen across several sectors. The foundations for strong results have been laid in every sector.
3. We have come a long way from where we stood eight years ago, and it gives me real satisfaction to see today's Meghalaya, and the road ahead of us. We can see the change in the farthest corners of our villages. We can see it on our roads and other basic infrastructure. It makes every one of us happy when our farmers' pineapples reach international markets, when our youth represent India at Youth Parliaments, become the voice of Bollywood, or dominate the football field and when our mothers get better care during childbirth. In the past, we were seen as a remote Northeastern state. Today, Meghalaya is recognised as a prime tourist destination, as a high value horticulture hub, as India's premier concert destination, as a growing sporting powerhouse and an emerging model of participatory good governance.
4. Over these eight years, every mission we launched, every road we made, every scheme we started, has been built around three foundations that hold any society together – protecting and preserving our land, empowering our people, and upholding our culture.

5. Our land is our greatest strength. Our forests, rivers, soil and biodiversity are not just natural heritage, but they are what our people's lives and livelihoods depend on. Meghalaya is among the greenest States in India, with 76 per cent forest cover. For generations, our communities protected these forests on their own, without any support from anyone. We felt they deserved support. We started the country's largest Payment for Ecosystem Services programme - GREEN Meghalaya plus. We brought 63,000 hectares of natural forest under conservation and now reward close to 6,300 farmers with more than ₹10,000 annually for every hectare they protect.
6. We are making strong efforts to protect our water resources. More than 60,000 springs across the State have been mapped and are now being protected. Over 500 large water-harvesting structures are being created. These efforts are making a difference in people's lives. In 2019, only 4,550 rural households in Meghalaya had a tap water connection. Today, 5.47 lakh rural households have reliable tapped water supply.
7. We are also transitioning to a sustainable way of leveraging our mineral resources. When coal mining was banned in 2014, thousands of families lost their livelihoods. We fought hard to uphold their rights. The Supreme Court of India in 2019, affirmed the rights of Meghalaya's private and community landowners over both the land and the minerals beneath it. That is not just a legal technicality, friends. That is our pride! I am happy to inform you that the process of scientific mining has begun in our state. We are also working on a framework to support small miners so that their lives and livelihoods can be secured.
8. The bond between land and livelihood is most direct in our farms. I remember visiting farmers in Nokrek area in West Garo Hills and meeting a Nokma whose land had been burnt for jhum, season after season. I expected him to ask for relief. He did not. He looked at me and said: "Give me an orchard, and I will stop the fire." Friends, that one line has stayed with me ever since. He was not asking me to be rescued. He was asking for an alternative.
9. That is how CM FARM+ was born. Through this scheme, we are providing high -value, long gestation crops to over 25,000 farmers across all twelve districts.
10. Friends, the true measure of progress is not just hectares. It is the lives that we are transforming. Through flagship missions -the Lakadong Mission, the Organic Mission, the Floriculture Mission and

the Ginger Mission - we are helping thousands of farmers double their incomes. In Mairang, Eastern West Khasi Hills, Kong Jubandasumarlin Nongsiej grows oriental liliu under our Floriculture Mission. We did not give her cash- we gave her a working polyhouse, the bulbs, the training, and the packing material to reach a market. The first crop cycle earned her ₹30,470. The second earned her ₹86,740, nearly three times as much. She then put that money into a vegetable garden and a few piglets - two enterprises were created, that were never funded. We backed just the flowers. She built the rest herself. When our farmers work this hard, the Government stands fully behind them.

11. We have not forgotten the smaller, everyday worries of our farmers including crop failures and crash in market prices. Last year we supported more than 4,500 broom grass farmers through exactly that distress, under CM Assure. We now pay the farmer's share of the premium of over 72,000 farmers under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. In West Garo Hills, Gresita G. Marak of Gangbanga had insured her ginger. Her crop failed. Some years ago, that would have been the end of her season and the start of a debt. Now, the Government paid about ₹19,000 into her account, to deal with the crop loss. Gresita was not lucky, friends. She was insured through government's support.
12. Our farmers have for generations grown some of the finest produce on earth and were never paid the right price for it. The nearest place to process a crop was hundreds of kilometres away. We are changing that. Northeast India's largest organically certified spice-processing unit, at Bhoirymbong, Ri-Bhoi was recently inaugurated by our Hon'ble Union Finance Minister, Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman. It will process 10,000 metric tonnes of raw ginger a year and open wider markets for 5,500 farmers across 112 villages, increasing each of their incomes by ₹ 40,000 annually. We are setting up 40 such PRIME HUBS, to bring lakhs of farmers closer to fair markets.
13. Land also means the roads that connect us, and the opportunities they open up. Despite our steep terrain and heavy rain, Meghalaya today has one of the best road networks in the region. In the last eight years, more than 3,200 kilometers of roads have been built. These roads don't just carry vehicles. They carry tourists to discover our beautiful State. They open every corner of our State to opportunity. And every single day, they carry our children to schools, and our patients to hospitals.
14. Ambitious road projects have been taken up to provide the best connectivity to even the remotest areas of the State. Roads such as the Nongstoin-Mawait-Nongjri Road in West Khasi Hills, Upgradation of Dkhiah-Sutnga-Saipung-Pala upto Semmasi Road in East Jaintia Hills, the Weiloi-Mawsynram-

Phlangwanbroi corridor in East Khasi Hills, the Songsak-Mendipathar Road in East and North Garo Hills and the Chokpot-Karukol Road in South Garo Hills are transforming connectivity across the State.

15. If land is the foundation on which we build, our people are the reason we build at all. And that commitment begins even before a child is born. Over these years, the State Government has worked hard to make maternity and childcare more accessible and caring. Maternal deaths in Meghalaya have come down by over 56 per cent since 2020. Infant deaths have fallen by nearly 40 per cent during the same period. And for three continuous years, we have maintained 90 per cent full immunization coverage. Now, how does that happen? Not just by building hospitals. It happens when we ask the right questions!
16. In many remote villages, getting to a hospital was not easy. Pregnant mothers worried about the journey, the cost and the young children they would leave behind. As a result, many did not seek institutional care. We recognised this problem, and it led us to design the Chief Minister's Safe Motherhood Scheme. We built transit homes near the health centers, so that mothers from priority groups can move in, a week or ten days before their delivery date, and feel safe and cared for.
17. Let me tell you what that looks like on a difficult night. In West Garo Hills, a mother went into labour, far away from the Kherapara PHC. Word reached our Safe Motherhood team and the community, and they sprang into action. Her neighbours quickly made a stretcher out of bamboo and carried her through the difficult terrain to the point where our vehicle was waiting. She reached Kherapara PHC and was able to deliver a healthy baby girl. When government and community come together, miracles happen. The CM-Safe Motherhood vehicles have carried one lakh pregnant women safely to care, including more than 15,800 high-risk mothers. Distance no longer decides a mother's fate, or her child's.
18. Alongside safe motherhood, our Early Childhood Development Mission and Mission 1000 Days are looking after our mothers and children in the most crucial years of their lives. Today, we support nearly 4 lakh children, more than 50,000 pregnant and lactating mothers, and over 54,000 adolescent girls - including families in 1,278 villages that never had this support before. One promise runs through all of it: no mother left without care, no child denied a healthy start, no village too far for a caring government to reach.

19. This same commitment to our people's future is clearly visible in our classrooms. Meghalaya's education system has been historically facing a unique structural challenge. Relative to our population, we have one of the highest numbers of schools in the country, spread across multiple categories and often operating with limited resources. However, through sustained efforts over the past few years, change is happening.
20. Friends, I am delighted to inform you that this year, Meghalaya achieved something historic. On the Performance Grading Index, the national measure of how a state's schools perform, Meghalaya moved out of the lowest category altogether. Our score rose from 448 to 525 in just a single year, achieving one of the fastest improvements in the country. The improvement in pass percentages since 2018 is even more dramatic- from a meagre 57 % to 97.2 % at the SSLC level and from 75% to 86.6% per cent at the HSSLC level. Today, when I meet our young students, they are more confident, better taught, dream bigger and that, my friends, is what gives me and my team the greatest satisfaction.
21. Good educational outcomes should translate into meaningful jobs and careers. My late father used to tell us that the greatest investment a government can make is in its youth, because the returns are unlimited. I have never stopped believing that. Under the CM Skills Mission more than 55,000 young people have been trained since 2022 and many are building livelihoods, right here at home – in food processing, handicrafts and other service industries, some earning incomes of up to ₹1 lakh a month.
22. Lenish N. Sangma from Southwest Garo Hills successfully completed the integrated farming systems programme of Skills Meghalaya. Today, she is proudly self-employed earning a yearly income of ₹2.5 lakh from her fishpond, ₹300 per day from the duckery farm and ₹1,000 per week from her kitchen garden.
23. Nationally, over 3,100 of our young people have found jobs in hotels, restaurants, manufacturing and data processing across India's big cities.
24. Our youth have also started taking up quality employment in foreign countries, starting with the nursing and caregiving sector. Jenisha Lyngdoh in Kobe, Japan and Carolyne Marak in Singapore each earn over ₹1.5 lakh a month. I name them deliberately, friends, because a young person listening in Baghmara or Nongstoin should know the possibilities that are now available for Meghalaya's youth.

25. Some of our young people do not want a job. They want to create jobs. Before I entered public life, I was an entrepreneur myself, so I know what it is to start with nothing but an idea, and to transform it into a tangible business. PRIME was launched in 2020. It has grown and now supports over 6,000 entrepreneurs with funding, mentoring and hand holding support. CM-ELEVATE has supported over 3,000 beneficiaries. These programs have created about 10,000 direct and 25,000 indirect jobs.
26. Our star entrepreneur from Ri-Bhoi, Wallambok Pyngrope did not come to us first. He put his own savings behind his own idea, and then we came in behind him. His Eri yarn spinning unit, SaiLum, now gives thousands of cocoon-producing farmers a fair local buyer. One man's courage, with government's support, is strengthening livelihoods for over 9,500 people.
27. Among all the opportunities entrepreneurship has created, tourism has become one of Meghalaya's strongest sources of livelihood - turning our landscapes, our culture, our food and our hospitality into income. From around 12 lakh visitors in 2018, we now welcome nearly 18 lakh a year. Destinations like Umiam, Sohra, Mawkyrwat, Thadlaskein, Dawki, Nokrek, Siju, and New Shillong are being developed so visitors stay longer and put more income into the pockets of our communities. At the heart of our strategy is the State's Homestay mission, under which support of upto ₹ 7 lakhs is provided to individual entrepreneurs.
28. Pyndapborlang, from Southwest Khasi Hills, is one of our homestay beneficiaries. He has built a four-room homestay, with his own hands. Today, he earns ₹3.5 lakhs per annum. He employs two people from his own village, and he pays his cleaner seven thousand rupees a month. Three years ago, he was a young man waiting for someone to give him a job. Today he is the man giving one.
29. Benny Field Lyngdoh of East Khasi Hills, through our PRIME Tourism Vehicle Scheme, runs 20 trips a month and earns an additional ₹50,000. Friends, Tourism has not just created income - it has brought dignity.
30. Just as tourism opened doors for young entrepreneurs, music has given our artists a stage of their own. Not long ago, many talented musicians had the passion, but nowhere to perform, and no stable income. The Meghalaya Grassroots Music Programme has now turned cafés, public spaces and community events into paid stages, supporting over 8,850 artists through more than 18,000 performances, and carrying Meghalaya's music to Delhi, Mumbai, Japan and Singapore.

31. Our young people's dreams also extend to the playing field, and here too, Meghalaya's growth has been steady and deliberate. We believe that every child deserves the opportunity to play, compete and dream. That is why we are building sports infrastructure across the State, so that no district, no block and no community is left behind. Today, 240 grassroots projects have been completed or are underway.
32. However, infrastructure alone does not create champions. Our STAR Programme, guided by Olympian coaches, has assessed 24,500 young athletes, twelve of whom are now on the Super Elite pathway and already breaking State records. Enriyan Momin was discovered at a regular inter-school athletics meet in Bajengdoba, North Garo Hills, in 2022. Today she trains and studies in Shillong, she has competed in the Eastern Regional Long Jump Final, and she keeps setting new personal bests. Our talent is not confined to cities and towns, friends - it is out there in our remotest villages, and we are reaching everywhere to find and nurture it.
33. As Meghalaya prepares to host the 39th National Games, we hope to see our star athletes carry the State's flag with pride and bring home medals. But a medal should earn more than applause; it should open the door to a secure livelihood and a life of dignity. That is why we introduced the Meghalaya Outstanding Sportspersons Direct Appointment Policy, 2025, enabling athletes who represent the State and the nation and earns a distinction, to receive direct appointments to government service. Pynshngain Kurbah, from Ri-Bhoi who won bronze in Canoeing at the 38th National Games, became the first athlete to get a government job under our Direct Appointment Policy. To every young athlete training today, his journey sends a powerful message: give your heart and soul to your sport, and your government will stand behind you with opportunity and support at every step.
34. And friends, I want to say something directly to our youth here. We know drugs crept quietly into some of our public spaces, robbing young people of futures before they had truly begun. We do not say this with judgment - we say it with the resolve of a family determined to bring its own back. That is why the State Government launched a dedicated mission to fight this cause - our Drug Reduction, Elimination and Action, DREAM, Mission. In 2018, we had only nine rehabilitation centres. Today, we have fourteen of them. But the strongest defence against drugs is not just a rehabilitation center, it is a full life. A ball in hand. A coach who believes in you. A stage to perform on. A skill to build a career with. To every young person listening, this is my message - pick up a sport, walk into a gym, join a music

programme, learn a skill. Your government has built the ground. Now come and play for Meghalaya's future.

35. Opportunity must also be matched by access. That is why we built CM Connect. Previously, there was no single place where a citizen's grievance could be heard and resolved, or their ideas considered. Since 2024 we have connected with over one lakh citizens, through the 1971 helpline, WhatsApp, written petitions, our CM Connect Centres and my own block-level interactions.
36. The CM connect helpline has been a friend, guide and even a saviour for many of our citizens. Genal R. Marak went from Meghalaya to Srinagar in search of work and found himself stranded, harassed, and denied his wages. When his call reached the helpline, we left no stone unturned to bring him home and recover the ₹1.7 lakh that he was owed. That is what CM Connect is for: so that wherever our people need their government, they are heard, they are supported and never left alone.
37. Friends, in Meghalaya, we believe our identity is our development engine. Land gives us our foundation, people give us our purpose, but it is culture that holds land and people together- it is the thread that runs through everything we have built.
38. This year, the Golden Jubilee of the Wangala Festival will mark a historic moment for Meghalaya. The familiar rhythm of 100 drums will rise into the thunder of 1,000 drums, bringing our communities together and carrying the spirit of the Garo people.
39. We are also creating spaces where our heritage can be experienced and celebrated. At Smit, we are developing a vibrant cultural destination centered around the sacred Nongkrem Dance Festival - a proud expression of Khasi faith, tradition and identity. We continue to support our other vibrant festivals like Shad Suk Mynsiem and the colourful Behdienkhlam festival.
40. Through the Chief Minister's Research Grant, 48 scholars are exploring our land, languages and lineage. We are launching "Tracing the Roots," an ambitious programme, that will enable 75 scholars to travel to Vietnam, Cambodia and Tibet to study the origins and journeys of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo people. Friends, our past must not be given away to time. It must strengthen our identities and guide future generations.

41. The soul of a culture lives in its language. We have taken the historic step of granting Khasi and Garo, the status of official languages, alongside English. We will also continue to pursue their inclusion in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India.
42. Our cultural energy also lives on through Hello Meghalaya, the State-owned OTT platform, where 450 Khasi, Garo and Pnar artists tell stories in our own languages.
43. Friends, everything I have shared with you till now, is an outcome of Persistence, Participation and Possibility. And behind all three, one single purpose: you, the people of Meghalaya.
44. Persistence means staying with a problem long after it has stopped making headlines. We all remember the long hours of load-shedding this State once endured. Today, we have gone three consecutive years without any scheduled load-shedding. Our transmission losses have come down from 30 per cent to just 13.2 per cent. That did not happen by luck. It happened because we continued working on the problem, year after year.
45. That same persistence has been shown in dealing with the Inter-State boundary issue. Where earlier governments spoke only of maintaining status quo, this Government signed an MoU with Assam in March 2022, resolving 6 of 12 areas of difference, and restoring peace to border communities who can now live without fear. We will continue to walk towards finding a solution in the remaining 6 areas.
46. Participation means building with people, not just for them. Teachers are the bedrock of our education system, and for years the genuine concerns of our SSA, ad-hoc and other teachers stayed unresolved, caught in old and complicated issues. Last year I sat with their association and assured them that this government will find a lasting solution together. After many rounds of consultation, keeping both teachers and students in mind, we introduced a structured pay framework for more than 23,000 teachers, effective from 1 April 2026. The same spirit of participation runs through every village - through our VECs, our VHCs and our Self-Help Groups, where citizens' voices are heard in social and economic life.
47. And possibility means daring to build for a future we have not yet seen. Take New Shillong- we are building an entirely new city from the ground up - the State's new seat of governance, knowledge and enterprise. New Shillong's government offices, technology parks, hotels and skilling institutions will bring jobs closer to our citizens. From India's largest dedicated football stadium to India's second-

highest public monument - the iconic monolith towers, to a high-altitude shooting range, it will be a destination for tourism and sports. Further, with the proposed Shillong–Silchar High-Speed Corridor passing nearby and the expansion of Shillong Airport, it can be a growth centre not just for Meghalaya but for the whole of Northeast.

48. At the same time, transformative connectivity is taking shape in western Meghalaya. The construction of India's longest river bridge will reduce the journey between Dhubri and Phulbari from 212 kilometres to just about 20 kilometres, opening up immense development possibilities for the Garo Hills.
49. Friends, Meghalaya's exciting development journey is guided by Vision 2032, a roadmap I set out in 2022, believing then, as I believe now, that real transformation takes at least a decade to take root. We are four years in, and I can tell you with confidence: we are fulfilling it, one persistent, participatory, and purposeful step at a time. Our economy has more than doubled since 2018, making Meghalaya the third fastest-growing State in India over the last five years.
50. I would like to thank the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri. Narendra Modi for all his support, and his recent acknowledgement of Meghalaya's post-COVID economic growth and commitment to sound financial management and fiscal discipline.
51. Despite the many achievements, the government's work is never truly finished. There are villages still waiting for better connections, young people waiting for a first opportunity, families working towards a better income. We carry no illusion that the road ahead is short. But our intentions have always been correct. We have always kept our people first, our farmers first, our mothers first, our youth first and Meghalaya's story is being written by all of us together.
52. Friends, I began by speaking of our living root bridges - how our ancestors built something they knew they might never see finished, because they trusted the future. That is the same trust I ask of you. Great things take time. They take perseverance, they take participation and above all they take purpose. If there is one message, I want you to carry home today, let it be this: stay optimistic, be patient and aspire high.
53. The coming year is going to be very special for Meghalaya. As the State turns 55, we host the 39th National Games and the preparations for this are on track. More than 10,000 athletes from across the country shall compete in nearly 39 disciplines and we want Shillong, Tura and Jowai to shine on the

national stage. We want our culture and hospitality to be experienced. We want our athletes to excel. We want our youth and our communities to be partners in this grand celebration.

54. May the Almighty bless our hills, protect our hardworking people, and guide our steps towards ever greater heights of peace and prosperity.

I wish everyone a Happy 80th Independence Day!

Khublei! Mitela! Jai Hind! Jai Bharat!