



सत्यमेव जयते

GOVERNMENT OF MEGHALAYA

74<sup>th</sup>  
INDEPENDENCE DAY  
SPEECH

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15<sup>th</sup> AUGUST, 2020  
SHILLONG

## 74th INDEPENDENCE DAY SPEECH

15th AUGUST, 2020

My dear fellow citizens,

1. On the occasion of the celebration of the 74th Independence Day, I take this privilege to convey my heartfelt greetings to all the people of Meghalaya. Friends, all of us know that this is an unusual year and we are living through unprecedented times. The COVID-19 global pandemic has disrupted economic and social life like never before. It necessitated drastic measures like a forty-day national lockdown and the most stringent travel restrictions. Societies across the world are adapting to new norms of social distancing, staying indoors and conducting interactions remotely. In these testing times, we take inspiration from our freedom struggle and recollect with gratitude the contributions of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Subhash Chandra Bose and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in building our great nation. We are also proud of the contributions of the patriots of our own State, U Tirot Sing, U Kiang Nangbah, Pa Togan Sangma; and of their selflessness and steadfast devotion to the cause of freedom. Let us commemorate our freedom fighters and let us re-dedicate ourselves to the service of our State and our Nation.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused loss of lives and well-being and led to wholesale disruption of the economies across the globe. During these difficult

times, Meghalaya has been a beacon of hope and made a place for itself in the national and global mind space. We are amongst the lowest COVID impacted States in the country in terms of number of cases. Currently, with a total of 1,228\* cases, we have the lowest number of cases per million population amongst all Indian States and union territories barring Lakshadweep. This is a matter of great pride and we all should take a moment to congratulate ourselves on this achievement.

3. This achievement is a result of consistent, systematic and unwavering efforts of the frontline health workers, the community and the Government. The night of 13th April 2020, when the first case was detected in the State remains a testimony to this. Overnight, the entire state machinery was activated, helplines were set up, online portals were channelised, health workers were mobilised and as a result, we were able to locate and isolate over 5,000 potential primary contacts. The health department, the district administrations, the police personnel, the sanitation workers and citizen volunteers worked tirelessly to ensure that the spread of the virus was contained.
4. This was also the time when a large number of the people of our State were stranded in different parts of the country and needed support. The Government acted swiftly to provide relief to over 10,000 such stranded citizens and transferred an amount of Rs. 3,000 each to their bank accounts.

5. Once the lockdown eased, we started the process of bringing all our people back to the State. We were receiving distress calls from Kerala to Kashmir, and from Ahmedabad to Aizawl. In less than three weeks, we arranged 13 special trains from Chennai, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Goa, Rajasthan, Gurugram, Gujarat and Kerala to ferry our citizens back home. Over 100 buses and other vehicles were also deployed to bring back the citizens who were stranded in the North East. The State not just paid for their travel to their homes, but also took utmost care to ensure their safety and health.
  
6. Post the opening up of limited air and rail travel, more people started returning to the State. The total number of people who returned to the State stands at over 27,000. We have a very rigorous protocol to ensure that every returnee is registered, tested and quarantined for the mandatory period of 14 days. We developed technology platforms and deployed IVRS calling systems to monitor the returnees right from the time they enter Meghalaya. In addition, follow up calls and home visits by grassroot workers including the ASHAs, ANMs and Anganwadi workers are made mandatory. In total, Over Seven Lakh IVRS calls were made and another 84,453 home visits were done by the frontline workers. The Government also ensured that provision kits consisting of necessities like food, sanitary products and medicines were delivered to every quarantined household. Till date around 29,000 such Provision Kits have been distributed.

7. The Government has utilised the last four months to ramp up its health infrastructure for combating COVID. We are equipped with around 1,500 dedicated COVID beds. We also have 32 dedicated ventilators, 80 BiPap Machines and over 2,56,000 Personal Protective Equipments. Our testing capacity has dramatically improved. From 30 tests per day in April, we have scaled up our daily testing capacity to almost 1,000 RT-PCR tests. We now have 12 testing centres spread across nine districts of the State. The remaining two districts will also be provided with testing facilities very shortly.
  
8. Another significant aspect of our COVID management strategy was the setting up of high-quality institutional quarantine centres. I would like to thank the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) for voluntarily offering its new campus at Umsawli to be converted into Corona Care Centre. This is one of the largest Corona Care Centre in the region with 258 rooms with attached toilets. Across the State, we have 2,700 beds for quarantine. I compliment the fantastic services being provided by the health department staff and the various government and non-government staff working tirelessly to run these centres. The cleaning staff, in particular, deserve our special gratitude. The services at our quarantine centres have been recognised and appreciated through hundreds of letters, posters and social media posts.
  
9. In addition to the government run quarantine centres, we also have over 1,200 Community Quarantine Centres which are set up and fully managed by the communities. Government is supporting these active centres through a grant of Rs. 10,000. The Community Quarantine Centres and COVID Management

Committees in each village and locality is a huge success story of Meghalaya's COVID response. It is also a testimony to the communitarian and caring ethos of the State and has been lauded by the 'World Health Organization.' I would like to thank and acknowledge the leadership of all our community leaders including the Rangbah Shnongs, the Dorbors, the Nokmas and the youth. The exemplary fearlessness and sensitivity displayed by leaders like Bah Borlik Suting, the Rangbah Shnong of Mawtharia- Pomlakrai village, the first rural area to have a COVID positive case, is worth highlighting.

10. Continuing the model of community engagement, the government has recently set up Behavioural Change Management Committees (BCMC). These committees will build citizen capacity to deal fearlessly with COVID and will particularly focus on protecting the elderly and persons with comorbidities.
11. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those who contributed about Rs. 9.5 Crore to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund. Your contributions have helped us acquire 45 ambulances, three bio medical waste vans and take up other relief efforts.
12. Dear Citizens, I now want to talk about the economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 and the efforts and plans of the Government to deal with this disruption. The Government's first priority during the lockdown was to ensure that every household had enough food grains. I am happy to inform you that we were able to achieve this.

13. The lockdown has also adversely impacted the livelihoods of the laborers and the daily wage earners. To alleviate their distress, an amount of Rs. 51 Crore was spent- Rs. 5,000 each for 25,794 registered workers and Rs. 2,100 each for 1,81,491 unregistered workers. Further, an amount of Rs. 25 Lakh was released to all the MLAs of the State for supporting the wellbeing of the people in their constituencies. Further, 3,18,000 women bank account holders were provided an assistance of Rs. 1,500 each, 1,38,000 farmers were provided an assistance of Rs. 2,000 each and 53,692 pensioners were also supported under the Pradhan Mantri Gharib Kalyan Yojana.

14. Though these measures provided immediate relief, there was a need for deeper thinking and analysis to understand the way out of the economic turmoil caused by COVID. Therefore, a Chief Minister's Task Force on the Economy was constituted to recommend short, medium and long term recommendations for reviving the State economy. Based on these recommendations, I am launching the RESTART MEGHALAYA MISSION. This mission comprises a series of programs to support our farmers, and entrepreneurs and to build growth promoting basic infrastructure and services. We are calling this mission RESTART because we want to revive and give a push to the different development activities that were brought to a standstill by COVID. I am committing an amount of Rs. 14,515 Crores which is to be spent over the next three years for the RESTART MEGHALAYA MISSION. Out of this, 7,839 Crores have been earmarked for this year.

15. The first set of programs under the RESTART MEGHALAYA MISSION relate to the primary sector. Farming and farmers lie at the epicentre of our rejuvenation plan. We are all aware that the year 2020 has already been declared as the 'Year of the Farmer.' The economic slogan today is localization, not globalization. Given this, we in Meghalaya should also strive to become self-sufficient in the production and marketing of agricultural and allied products.
  
16. Our interventions will impact all aspects of agriculture, starting with inputs and ending with food processing and value addition. Agricultural credit is key for strengthening production. We target to double the reach of the Kisan Credit Card program from the current number of 86,000 within one year. We will also make the KCC loans very attractive by providing an interest subvention of 2% on timely repayment. This measure, for the first time in the history of the State, will enable Meghalaya's farmers to avail loans with only 2% interest rate.
  
17. Technology induction is essential for raising productivity. Accordingly, 400 agri-entrepreneurs will be supported in the purchase of power tillers with a 50% subsidy. Rs. 4 Crores will be spent on this measure. Collection and Aggregation of the produce comes next in line, where we need to build economies of scale. We have already started a program for formation of about 10,000 Farmer Producer Groups across the State. A corpus fund of Rs. 10 Crore is being set up to provide lower interest rate loans to Producer Group members. These producer groups will be slowly aggregated into Farmers' Producer Organizations that will focus on marketing and value addition. We plan to build at least 50 Farmer Producer

Organizations across the State by 2022. These Farmer Producer Organizations will become the focal points for taking up higher value addition activities like food processing.

18. In the immediate term, Rs. 15 Crore has been sanctioned for the setting up of modern Markets in all the districts of the State. An additional Rs. 5 Crore is approved for setting up of smaller Farmgate Infrastructure like collection centres. Prefabricated technologies will be used to quickly set up this infrastructure in the current financial year itself. The Government recently notified the Meghalaya State Agricultural Produce and Livestock Marketing (Promotion & Facilitation) Act, 2020. The act empowers the farmers and will bring about fairness in Agricultural Marketing and transparency in transactions between farmers and traders.

19. Markets need to be serviced by a robust and efficient supply chain system. We already have the 1917 iTEAMS, an uber like model for evacuation of agriculture produce. Our iTEAMS vehicles evacuated around 684 tonnes of produce during the first phase of the lockdown. We now plan to upscale the 1917 iTEAMS. Under this plan, 100 agri-entrepreneurs will be supported to purchase agri-response vehicles through a 50% subsidy. Rs. 4 Crore will be spent on this program. In addition to these new measures, existing missions on Lakadong Turmeric, Jackfruit and Aroma plant cultivation will continue to be supported. Rs. 5 Crore each is being spent on the implementation of these Missions. A further Rs. 2.9 Crores has been approved for the construction of Shiitake Mushroom Production and Training Unit at Upper Shillong.

20. Livestock is a source of alternate and steady revenue generation. Infact, income generation from livestock is higher than that from Agriculture in many regions of our State. Accordingly, we are giving a massive push to the livestock sector with particular emphasis on Piggery. The Piggery Mission has been restructured to suit the needs of a post-COVID world. The mission is funded by a National Cooperative Development Corporation loan of Rs. 209 Crore, of which Rs. 55 Crore will be spent in this year itself. This mission will be implemented through Cooperative Societies and is expected to benefit around 25,000 people in the state. We have designed the mission to provide zero interest, long-term loans to pig breeders and fatteners through the Meghalaya Cooperative Apex Bank. Even after repaying the loan, every breeder will earn about Rs. 60,000 annually and fatteners will earn about Rs. 10,000. The Mission will make us self-sufficient in pork production, while improving the incomes and nutrition levels of our people.

21. The second priority area under the RESTART MEGHALAYA MISSION is the promotion of well-being and livelihoods in rural areas. MGNREGS remains the pivotal program in this space. While Rs. 1,098 Crore was spent on the program in the last financial year, we have already spent about Rs. 700 Crore in the last four months. This year, the MGNREGS expenditure is expected to touch Rs. 1,600 crores. This will translate into an average direct annual income of about Rs. 17,000 to the 5,89,000 registered rural households in the State. I complement the Community and Rural development team, including all our Block Development Officers and grassroots staff, for consistently making Meghalaya one of the best performers in the country under the MGNREGS program. Recently, the State cabinet made a landmark decision to reserve 50% of the leadership positions in

the Village Employment Council's for women. This decision should further improve the implementation of MGNREGS and the grassroots decision making processes.

22. Continuing the theme of women leadership, the other focus program under rural development is the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM). Under this program 10,329 women Self Help groups were promoted in 2019-20 and Rs. 73 crores was spent. This year we are targeting to reach upto 3,50,000 women at a cost of Rs. 120 crores.

23. Rural housing is another area which we will prioritise this year. We are targeting the construction of about 47,000 houses at an estimated cost of Rs. 611 crores under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana program.

24. The third priority area under the RESTART MEGHALAYA MISSION is entrepreneurship and small businesses. On account of the disruptions in both the supply and demand sides, MSMEs, particularly small businesses and entrepreneurs have been badly hit by the lockdowns and restrictions. Several of these businesses like small vendors, shopkeepers and small aggregators need some cash to restart work. However, many of our small businesses do have credit linkages with the banking system.

25. To solve this problem, I am starting the Chief Minister's Support program for small businesses and entrepreneurs. Under this program, the government is launching an online small loans portal, which will enable small businesses to easily apply for loans without having to physically visit the bank branches. More importantly, the Government will provide a one time grant support of upto Rs. 10,000 for any new small business loans of upto Rs. 50,000 that are availed. A corpus fund of Rs. 15 Crore is created for providing the grant component under this program.

26. Another very important category of entrepreneurs that currently need support are the large number of our skilled and entrepreneurial youth who have returned to the State. Amongst the returnees are highly skilled individuals with strong experience in the industries of IT, Financial Services, Media and Hospitality. A plan for Rs. 3.25 crore to support this group through building enterprises in the sectors of Manufacturing, Business and Service has recently been approved by North Eastern Council.

27. Friends, a fourth priority area under the RESTART MEGHALAYA MISSION is infrastructure improvement. Quality infrastructure forms the basis for long term development. Given this, we are giving a push like never before to achieve results in the infrastructure sectors. A total investment of Rs. 8,753 Crore is committed over the next three years.

28. In the roads sector, 13 major roads covering a length of about 350 Km will be constructed at an estimated cost of Rs. 850 Crores. Nine of these projects have already been tendered and the construction works will begin from September. These projects comprise the roads at Bajendoba-Resubelpara-Mendipathar-Damra, Rongram-Rongrenggre-Darugre, Agia-Medhipara-Phulbari-Tura, Shillong- Diengpasoh, Pasyih-Grampani, Laitkor-Pomlakrai, Umling-Patharkmah, Ronjeng-Mansang-Adokgre and Parallel road to existing Dalu-Baghmara Road. Detailed Project Reports for another four roads are being prepared- Mawmaram-Mawlyndep Road, Umsning - Jagi Road (0-40 kms) and Nongstoin-Maweit Road and the circular road in New Shillong Township.

29. Another flagship project- the Improvement and Widening of the 130 km Shillong -Dawki Road- is in the stage of tendering. Additionally, about 2,000 Km of rural roads are under construction under the 'Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana' program at a cost of about Rs. 1,600 crores. From State resources, Rs. 400 crores of works, covering a length of 517 kms, has been sanctioned in 2019-20 and implementation of many of these works will begin soon.

30. On water supply, we are leveraging on the Government of India's Jal Jeevan Mission. While the national target for achieving universal household tap connection is the year 2024, Meghalaya is targeting to provide functional household tap connections to all the 5,89,000 rural households in the State by 2022. A sum of Rs. 1,483 Crore has been earmarked for this year. I am personally monitoring the implementation of this project and am hopeful that we will be able to permanently resolve the rural water supply challenge.

31. On Urban water supply, the Tura Water Supply Scheme with an investment of Rs. 35 Crore is close to completion and the Sohra Water Supply Scheme with an investment of Rs. 25 Crore is at an advanced stage of completion. The Baghmara Water Supply Scheme with a total cost of Rs. 60 Crore has recently been sanctioned. Other Schemes like the Greater Ampati Water Supply Scheme and the Nongstoin Water Supply Schemes are progressing as per schedule.
32. The Power Sector will undergo a comprehensive revamp as part of the RESTART MEGHALAYA MISSION. The State Government has decided to avail the Rs. 1,345 Crore low-cost long-term loan being provided to the Distribution company, the MePDCL, as part of the Athmanirbar Bharat Abhiyan. This loan will enable our DISCOM to repay all outstanding dues to the various power companies. A roadmap for the loss reductions of DISCOM through reducing the Aggregate Transmission and Distribution losses over the next four years has been put in place. On the generation side, the State Government has decided to complete the 22.5 Mega watt Ganol Hydro Electric Project in the next two years.
33. Another critical infrastructure area, particularly relevant in the COVID situation, is Information Technology infrastructure. Moving everything online has become the order of the day. Applications like telemedicine, remote advisory support for farmers, e-meetings and trainings, which were seen as optional in the past, have now become mandatory. Accordingly, plans are afoot to improve the telephone and internet connectivity- 889 4G Towers will be installed that will cover 1,164 additional villages and stretches of National Highways.

34. Transport infrastructure, in general and air connectivity in particular is an area of importance. Direct flights to New Delhi are expected to be operationalized soon. A new helipad at New Shillong Township will also be constructed.

35. Urban infrastructure development is a core focus of this Government. The Shillong Smart City project is being implemented at a cost of Rs. 1,040 Crores. The government also intends to develop Tura and Jowai as smart towns. Accordingly, the development of public spaces, open-air gyms, children play areas, smart street lighting systems, solid waste management, solar-based charging points and other interventions are being planned. The Government is earmarking an amount of Rs. 50 Crores to each of these two towns.

36. Despite the COVID related disruptions, the government is leaving no stone unturned in creating the Sports infrastructure for hosting the 39th National Games. The actual construction of the P.A.Sangma integrated sports complex in Tura will begin from October 2020. The stadium is being constructed with an investment of Rs. 125 Crore and will be completed by early 2022. The designs for the JLN Integrated Sports Complex in Shillong, which is also being built at a cost of 125 Crores, have been finalised. A mega football stadium is also planned to be constructed at Wahiajer, West Jaintia Hills with an investment of Rs. 25 Crore. We are also committed to building Rural Sports Infrastructure all over the state and another Rs. 50 crores will be spent on the same in the next three years.

37. Friends, the fifth priority area under the RESTART MEGHALAYA MISSION focuses on Tourism. In our state, close to 50,000 people are dependent on Tourism for sustenance and livelihood. I understand the economic hardship faced by the various tourism stakeholders, including hoteliers, home-stay owners, restaurant owners, shopkeepers around tourist sites, tourism guides and taxi drivers.

38. Unfortunately, it might take many more months for normal travel and tourism to be restored. However, I am hopeful we will be able to do limited and restricted opening as and when the COVID situation improves in the rest of the country. Hill states like Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand have recently opened up to tourists. We can focus on destinations away from urban areas with plenty of open spaces and with minimal COVID- related risks. Meghalaya is ideally positioned as a pristine, low-COVID destination and many high-spending tourists from within the country will be very keen to travel here.

39. Our goal, whenever we reopen, is to transition to a model of High Value - Low Volume - Sustainable tourism. To become a high-value destination, we need to increase the number of high-value rooms from the current number of 200 to at least 500 in the next two years. As private investment might be difficult to come through, the government will make the investments of about Rs. 200 Crore in creating high value accommodation and tourism infrastructure. We have already finalized the planning process for iconic tourism projects like the ropeway to Shillong peak and a luxury boutique resort in the Nokrek Area in Garo Hills among others.

40. In addition to infrastructure creation, we also need to define carrying capacities for all our sites and charge higher entry fees. That way, we can earn the same revenue with lesser tourists. This is ideal both from the COVID and the environmental perspective. I urge our communities to embrace the new normal, be accommodating and prepare to welcome the tourists whenever tourism reopens. The government will put in thorough COVID-prevention protocols to ensure the safety of both the locals and the visitors.

41. Dear Citizens, the sixth and perhaps the most significant priority area under the RESTART MEGHALAYA MISSION is Human Development. Education lies at the core of Human Development. We are taking steps to ensure that children continue to learn, despite the shutting down of schools. To facilitate remote learning, we are planning to distribute tablets to 25,000 Class XI students. On the infrastructure front, the process of construction of 13 Ekalavya Model Residential Schools will soon begin; another 25 such schools have recently been sanctioned. I am taking all steps to ensure the completion of all the 40 Ekalavya Model Residential Schools by the end of 2022. The construction of these schools will cost about Rs 960 Crore.

42. In higher and technical education, we will complete the construction of the four polytechniques at Ri Bhoi, West Khasi Hills, South Garo Hills and East Garo Hills Districts. We will also make investments in polytechnics at Shillong, Tura and Jowai. Degree colleges at Baghmara, Sohra and Williamnagar have been identified for up-gradation and improvement, with an investment of Rs. 12 Crores each.

43. Health care is the cornerstone of human development. The Government has always prioritized Health and given the current situation, this becomes even more important. Alongside the fight against COVID-19, we have continued our efforts to improve child and maternal health. The MOTHER program piloted last year in South West Garo Hills has been expanded to the entire State this year. Ri Bhoi has been awarded the Best Performing Aspirational District in the entire country in the area of Health. East Garo Hills has seen an increase of 60% in their institutional deliveries in comparison to July 2019. Over 25,360 infants have received full immunization during this COVID pandemic in comparison to 21,130 infants during the same period last year. We are now amongst the top three States in the Country in immunization. The Government is fully committed to improving the institutional delivery rate to 80% by the next year and reducing maternal mortality by half.

44. Improving public health infrastructure in every nook and corner of the State has always been the high priority of this Government. We have finalised a comprehensive plan for investing Rs. 352 crores for the improvement of health systems over the next four years. Rs. 75 crore is being invested this year for complete revamp of the infrastructure of PHCs and CHCs.

45. Social security is a key aspect of human development. Benefits under the Chief Minister's Social Assistance Program continue to be distributed in a timely manner to the 1,06,000 beneficiaries. The government is spending Rs. 65 Crore on this program. Additionally, I made a commitment in this year's budget speech to make regular monthly payments to all casual employees of the government. I am happy

that in most departments, the muster rolls and casual employees are now being paid their emoluments every month rather than every quarter.

46. Friends, this Government made a commitment in the recent budget that we will transform Meghalaya into one of the top ten States of the country. Despite the current COVID crisis, we are very much on track. All the investments that I outlined in the RESTART MEGHALAYA MISSION will propel us towards progress and wellbeing. Despite the difficult overall economic situation, the Government has managed to find the resources to invest in both short and medium-term growth. I would like to thank the Government of India and our Hon'ble PM for their continued support to all our programs and projects.

47. My dear citizens, through the last few months, I have been constantly reminded of what my late father used to say about challenges and our responses to them. He would say that the true character of a person is revealed during trying times and that each of us has a choice to respond to crisis either with fear or with courage. Meghalaya, and all of its people have responded to the COVID crisis with courage and dignity. We have demonstrated that a caring government and a sensitive society can together accomplish a great deal. Friends, let me reiterate that despite the current total positive case count of 1,228\*, our State has the lowest COVID-19 cases per million population. The Government has clear protocols for containing the spread of the virus. We also have the health infrastructure in the eventuality of an increase in cases. We should also remember that 581\* people have already recovered from COVID-19 and are living normal lives. They should be looked upon as inspirations who emerged victorious and

given all the support and confidence. There can be no room for stigmatization of any individual. The virus demands us to be vigilant, but not fearful. The economic damage caused by the lockdowns is immense and lockdown cannot be our long-term response to coronavirus. There is a need to change our behaviour incorporating the cardinal principles of the new normal- social distancing, mask wearing, hand washing and proper cough etiquette. With the right behavioral changes, we can continue to live our lives, conduct our daily business and protect ourselves and our loved ones.

48. I would, once again, like to thank all our frontline health workers, the health department, the district administrations, the police personnel, the sanitation workers, the entire State administrative machinery, public representatives, community and locality leaders, Non- Governmental Organizations, the media and citizen volunteers who have been working tirelessly to help us contain the spread of the coronavirus.

Once again, I wish all my fellow citizens a very "Happy Independence Day".

**KHUBLEI!!! MITELA!!! JAI HIND!!!**

*\* As of 6 PM, 14th August*