

“Sisters and brothers,

I am very happy to be with you today to lay the foundation stone for the improvement/widening of the National Highway NH-40 from Shillong to Dawki.

It gives me immense pleasure to visit this magical land of Meghalaya on my tour of the North-East. Endowed with a spectacular natural beauty and a rich cultural diversity, Meghalaya has always played a key role in our national development. My warm greetings to the people of the state on this occasion!

Sisters and brothers,

This project to improve/widen the Highway is a prestigious and important initiative of the Government of India being executed with assistance from Japan International Cooperation Agency. It is expected to provide better connectivity in the region and provide a key link within the North-East Region as well as with our friendly neighbor, Bangladesh. This road will also give a fillip to the tourism industry in the state and help in the overall development of Meghalaya.

I am also aware that many other projects such as the 2-laning of Tura-Dalu section, 2-laning of the Ranikor-Maheshkhola-Baghmara section among others are being planned and implemented in the state, in addition to the Shillong Western Bypass which is at the planning stage. These are good initiatives that need to be fast-tracked and completed in a mission mode.

Similarly, in order to enhance the connectivity in other North-East region States, the government has been implementing various projects under the Special Accelerated Road Development Programme for North East (SARDP-NE) and the Bharatmala Pariyojana. I am told that about 3850 km have been awarded and 2815 km completed under SARDP-NE and under Bharatmala Pariyojana, 2118 km have been awarded and 514 km have been completed so far. I compliment the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways for their determined efforts to connect the North-East region.

Friends,

As you are aware, connectivity is an important catalyst for economic growth. A good road network is crucial to enhance commerce and trade, ease the transportation of goods and services and promote inter-state connectivity. Roads are thus the lifelines of any modern economy.

One of the persistent issues with roads in this topography is their continued maintenance. This should be given due priority by governments and local authorities along with road extensions and widening.

The terrain of the region too limits the scope of availability of land for construction and widening of roads and highways. The rainy months, in a state like Meghalaya, often hinder road construction activities and completion of projects. All these issues call for innovation in the design and construction of roads in a hilly topography. Technical institutions around the country must take this as an opportunity and bring out better road designs, while cutting down on the implementation period.

Given the complexities of road connectivity in the region, air connectivity is certainly an important aspect of connecting the North East. In this regard, I am happy to note that there has been a marked improvement in connecting Shillong to other cities through direct flights under the Regional Connectivity Scheme. I wish to see more direct flights from and to the North East with the rest of the country in the coming years.

Sisters and brother,

One of the biggest positive outcomes of better infrastructure and connectivity is that of increased tourism. Meghalaya is a beautiful state with huge tourism potential which needs to be tapped to its fullest. I am sure the completion of this project will also give a major boost to the tourism of Meghalaya.

Similarly, the State and Central governments have been striving to improve the infrastructure for increasing the tourist footfall. Many new places with high tourism potential are being discovered. More concerted efforts are needed not only to improve the facilities for tourists, but also publicize the picturesque tourist spots in the state. While promoting tourism, we must ensure that our pristine ecological systems are not disturbed in any manner. There has to be a fine balance between tourism and development.

Sisters and brothers,

I am glad to note that, over the years, Meghalaya has also been diversifying its economy by promoting agro-entrepreneurship. Given the large area in the state under horticulture, this gives immense opportunities to budding entrepreneurs for adding value to the supply chain.

In this regard, I am aware that the Meghalaya government has started an innovative PRIME Hub initiative to encourage entrepreneurship among the youth and also to equip them with skill-based learning. This is an excellent effort and if implemented with earnestness, can go a long way in contributing towards the Prime Minister's call for Atma Nirbhar Bharat.

A good instance of agro-entrepreneurship is the huge demand created for Lakadong turmeric and ginger powder from the state, earning global reputation in recent times. Similarly, there is a great opportunity to market and showcase our other indigenous horticultural varieties to the world. We need to improve our productivity, packaging, ensure highest quality assessment, improve infrastructure and handhold our small farmers to ensure that their products get the right price in the marketplace. We need to encourage our youth to take up agro-entrepreneurship in a big way.

Sisters and brothers,

The improvement/widening of this road and the resultant improved connectivity gains significance in this wider context. Together, with determined efforts, we can fast-track development of Meghalaya in various sectors and do justice to the hard-working and diligent people of this beautiful state.

Before I conclude, I would like to take a moment to congratulate Ms. Rebecca Vanessa Suchiang here for becoming the first indigenous woman Chief Secretary of Meghalaya. Her achievement will inspire many more young boys and girls of Meghalaya to take up government services as a career in the coming times.

Once again, I am very happy to be here and lay the foundation stone for the improvement/widening of NH-40 between Shillong to Dawki. I congratulate the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, the Government of Meghalaya and the executing agency NHIDCL on this momentous occasion.

I wish all success for this landmark project and hope that it will be completed within the planned time frame.

My best wishes to the people of Meghalaya.

Khublei,

Mitela,

Jai Hind!”

