

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SMT DROUPADI MURMU
ON THE OCCASION OF 75 YEARS CELEBRATION OF THE
GAUHATI HIGH COURT**

Guwahati, April 7, 2023

I am indeed glad to be here among you on this occasion which is historic for the Gauhati High Court. Completing 75 years of public service is undoubtedly a cause of great pride. So let me first congratulate all those associated with this court – Judges, lawyers and court employees of the past and the present – for their significant contributions to this outstanding institution. I also congratulate the people of the North-East in general, and the people of Assam in particular, as they have also made crucial contributions to this achievement.

A period of 75 years is but a blink in history, but it is indeed a long time for individuals, and the institutions they build. Last year, we began celebrating 75 years of Independence. The whole nation is celebrating this in the form of 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsava' with patriotic fervour. Milestones like this make us aware of the past that has shaped our present. That is also true for our celebrations today. Today's occasion reminds us of the vision and commitment of those who shaped this institution in its early years.

The Gauhati High Court, of course, holds a unique place in India's judicial landscape. After its inception in 1948, it had jurisdiction over seven states for more than six decades and still has jurisdiction over four states. At one point of time, its jurisdiction included Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. After the establishment of separate High Courts for the States of Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura in 2013, the Gauhati High Court has jurisdiction over the States of Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, with its Principal Seat at Guwahati and three permanent Benches in Kohima, Aizawl and Itanagar.

The Gauhati High Court has also established a distinct identity for itself by producing a number of legal luminaries, some of whom have also ascended to the distinguished position of the Chief Justice of India. It has also received attention for delivering several landmark decisions. I am confident that the Gauhati High Court will continue to serve the people in the same manner in the years to come.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The North-Eastern Region comprising eight states is aptly described as the area of Ashta-Lakshmi. This Region of the Rising Sun is possibly the best example of how various communities have lived together historically. As a result, it has rich ethnic and linguistic diversity. In such a region, institutions need to have a great deal of sensitivity and responsibility, as divergent traditions and laws govern the lives of the people of the region. The indigenous people of the hill areas prefer conciliatory processes rather than somewhat adversarial systems. Some of the customary practices for dispute resolution prevalent here are not only expeditious, they are also highly effective. The legislations applicable to different areas may vary, but the entire area is administered by a common High Court.

In this light, it is heartening to see that the Gauhati High Court continues to uphold the customary laws that have been in practice in some of the states under its jurisdiction. By respecting the sentiments of the indigenous people, this institution has helped enhance the ethos of peaceful coexistence in this region. Thus, this Court can rightly take pride in administering justice in an area with great variations, geographically as well as ethnically.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When I was thinking about the achievements of the Gauhati High Court, I also gave a thought to the role of justice in our society. The foundation of India as a modern Republic is our magnificent Constitution, whose cornerstone is justice. The framers of the Constitution had a vision that had emerged out of our glorious freedom struggle. They envisioned Independent India as a nation

where all citizens were equal in every sense of the term. Equality was meant not only as equality before law. That is why their notion of justice was quite expansive. Justice includes economic and social justice as well. Indeed, it expands beyond two or three aspects, and it becomes the duty of every generation to make the term meaningful in its time.

In our time, I believe, we must become sensitive to ecological justice. Environmental degradation has led to great injustice to many communities around the world. In fact, we need to be sensitive to other species as well as towards the whole ecology, because humankind as a whole has done unprecedented damage, that is, injustice to the other members of Mother Nature's family. Working towards ecological justice can take many forms, and the legal fraternity, I am sure, will also make meaningful contributions to it.

Speaking of justice, I cannot help but repeat what I have said before. I strongly believe that justice, by definition, has to be inclusive, and thus must be accessible to all. However, access to justice is hindered by many factors. Cost of justice is one of them, and we need to keep expanding the reach of free legal counselling. The language of justice is another hindrance, but there is praiseworthy progress in that direction and the higher judiciary has started making verdicts available in more and more regional languages. There can be many more innovations to make the legal processes inclusive in terms of language.

We should also note the increasing role of technology in the administration of justice. This welcome development has been solving many problems that had affected the system for long. I especially urge the young generation – young lawyers and students of law – to find technological solutions in the legal domain that can provide a helping hand to the poor and the needy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I once again congratulate all individuals associated with the Gauhati High Court on the occasion of completion of 75 years of its service to

justice and jurisprudence. I wish you and this august institution all the best for the journey ahead. As the festive spirit welcoming Rongali Bihu is in the air, I offer my warmest greetings to all of you.

Thank You.

Jai Hind!

Jai Bharat!