



On the occasion of
71st Independence Day Celebration



Address of
Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam
SHRI SARBANANDA SONOWAL

15th August, 2017
Guwahati

Respected citizens,

On this auspicious occasion of 71st Independence Day of our country, I extend my heartiest greetings to the people of Assam and I take this opportunity to pay homage to the valiant martyrs and the great freedom fighters of our country. I also offer my heartfelt tribute to the father of our nation- Mahatma Gandhi and all the freedom fighters. On this occasion, I also offer my sincere homage to the gallant martyrs of our State- Maniram Dewan, Kushal Konwar, Piyoli Phukan, Mukunda Kakoty, Kanaklata Baruah, Bhogeswari Phukanani and others who have brought glory to our State by their self sacrifice.

On this solemn occasion, I also respectfully remember the sacrifices of the great martyr soldiers of our country who laid down their lives relentlessly protecting our national frontiers, safeguarding our nation's sovereignty and fighting against terrorism.

I offer my deepest condolences to the families of those persons who have died due to floods and electrocution. I also share the pain of all those who have suffered injuries and those who have lost their valuable properties during the floods. I extend my heartfelt sympathy to all the families affected by floods.

Along with the rest of the country, during our great freedom struggle the volunteers of Assam also chanted "Vande Mataram" "Jai Bharat ki Jai" slogans and took bullets valiantly. Jyotiprasad Agarwala in the "Lobhita" (a play) vividly portrays the sacrifices of Kanaklata and other Assamese young women during the freedom struggle:

"Swadhinata dhan

Notu moron

Lohare xilere

Bandhi lo mon

Bajra konthe bishwak xuna

Satyar jay gaan

Bukur tejere dhui de

Aaji bharator opomaan."

Innumerable brave souls of our country gave up their precious lives to bring the Independence to the nation and washed away the disgrace of our motherland with their blood. The world history never recognised the assassin as valiant. Hence those great martyrs who gave up their lives for the sake of the country are always revered and remain a source of inspiration for all of us. We should always recall the great saying from the Vedas : "Vayam Rashtra Jogriyaam:" (meaning- we shall remain awake day and night for the Country) so that their sacrifices do not go in vain.

Greatly inspired by this vision, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, the illustrious son of Late Ashutosh Mukherjee sacrificed his life for the sake of India's unity and integrity in the soil of Jammu and Kashmir. I respectfully remember this great leader on this auspicious occasion.

Witnessing the slavery of our country at that time, even the children began dreaming for independence and their hearts illuminated with the aspirations for freedom. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika rightly sang—

"Paradhinata dekhi sishu Kushalar

Boisil tapat rudhir

Deshar Karane seye

Hia phali tez diley

O' mor senehor okoni okoni bir."

Therefore, it is our duty to instil the sense of patriotism in the hearts of the children. With this objective in mind, like last year, different competitions have been organized amongst children covering the themes of liberty and patriotism on 13th August as part of the three day celebration of Independence Day. Because, by allowing the latent talents of the children to flourish, we discover amongst them personalities like Lord Krishna, Jesus Christ, Prophet Hazarat Muhammad, Einstein, Mahatma Gandhi, Sui-ka-pha, Bir Chilarai, Lachit Borphukan, Kushal Konwar, Kanaklata, Joymoti, Mula Gabharu, Jyotiprasad, Bishnu Rabha, APJ Abdul Kalam and Dr. Bhupen Hazarika. We should encourage the children to get inspired by the thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi who always propagated love for mankind and also by the principles of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi, "Sabka Saath Sabka Vikash".

India has a unique civilization and culture in the whole world. For last 5000 years, Indian spiritual philosophy, culture and civilization is showing the right path to the whole world. Having been inspired by the Indian civilization and culture, Pundit Deendayal Upadhyay tirelessly strived for the upliftment of the downtrodden with the philosophy of 'Integral Humanism' in stark contrast to western materialistic thought and way of life. His ideal of 'Integral Humanism' is considered as an original concept throughout the world. In line with the progressive

thoughts of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay, the Central Government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi, as well as our State Government has been implementing numerous welfare schemes for upliftment of poor. On this auspicious day, I pay my heartfelt tribute to this great thinker for his immense contribution towards awakening consciousness of the Indian masses.

At the very moment of coming to power, we realized that the people of Assam have reposed huge faith in the Government and we have to work hard in all directions to fulfil their hopes and aspirations. Considering the trust and faith of the people as our foundation and, Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi's vision and values to fulfil the aspirations of the people as our prime inspiration, we have strongly proceeded with all sections of the society for the equal development of all, in tune with the principles of "Sabka Saath Sabka Vikash". It is worth mentioning that the Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi led Central Government has given special importance towards the development of our State.

As per the instructions of the Hon'ble Prime Minister, the Ministers from various Ministries of the Centre have been frequently visiting Assam and other North Eastern states, and have been discussing with the State Governments for accelerating the pace of development. It is a matter of great pride for all of us that the Honourable Prime Minister has addressed the nation from soil of our state on the occasion of completion of the third year of the Central Government and the first year of State Government.

We have been inspired by the strong measures adopted by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi for abolishing corruption

and we have also pledged to make our state free from corruption, illegal immigrants, terrorism and pollution. Today, on this auspicious occasion, we would like to introspect upon the extent to which we have been able to serve the people of the State during the last 15 months and the initiatives that we will take in the days to come.

After our Government came to power, we have adopted a policy of zero-tolerance towards corruption. After the Government took over charge, probe has been ordered against various cases of corruption so that it may be completely rooted out from the Government machinery so as to fulfil people's hopes and aspirations. In this process, the Government has been able to take bold steps against corrupt practices prevalent in some departments including A.P.S.C. As a result, corruption has been minimised in the state. As per survey report of "Centre for Media Studies" the percentage of corruption in the State was 34% in 2005 which has been minimised to 18% in 2017. On this auspicious occasion I would like to assure the people of the State that our Government would never tolerate corruption at any stage.

In this context, I am happy to inform you that due to pro-active efforts of our Government, after a gap of long 7 years, tripartite talks were held in New Delhi in April this year to discuss the issues relating to implementation of Assam Accord in letter and spirit within a stipulated time in presence of the Central Government, State Government and AASU leaders. In this meeting, threadbare discussion was held regarding issues like infiltration of foreigners, implementation of clause 6 and 7 of the Assam Accord; complete sealing of Indo-Bangla Border and updation of N.R.C. On the same day, discussion with a number of ethnic student bodies was also held by the Central Government.

The State Government is extending all possible help and cooperation to the process of updation of NRC which is being done under the supervision of Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. We believe, the updation of NRC will bring about a permanent solution to the problem of illegal influx of foreigners to the State. Moreover, the Foreigners Tribunals are detecting the illegal infiltrators in the State expeditiously. The Government of India is also laying stress on complete sealing of Indo-Bangla border on priority. We hope that Indo-Bangla Border will be sealed completely very soon.

The State Government has taken a number of steps towards safeguarding each and every ethnic group, tribe and community in the State. We had constituted a high level Committee under Sri Hari Shankar Brahma for suggesting measures to ensure protection of land rights of indigenous people in Assam. The Committee will suggest measures including modification in land laws, Government policy and land policy etc for ensuring protection of their land rights. Our Government has extended total cooperation to the round table discussion organised by North East Political Science Organisation and North East Policy Alternative which was held in order to safeguard the constitutional, legislative and administrative interests of the indigenous people of the State. Similarly, a discussion was held with the Union Home Minister regarding the demands of six ethnic groups of the State.

It is worth mentioning here that our Government, for the first time, organised a "Shradhanjali" programme at Veterinary College Field, Khanapara to pay homage to the martyrs of the Assam Movement. In this programme, ex-gratia of Rs.5 Lakh each was given to the next of kin of the families of 860 martyrs of Assam Movement. It is also worth mentioning that we are going to construct "Swadid Smaarak Khetra", a

Memorial Park covering a plot of 100 Bigha of land in the midst of Guwahati city in memory of the martyrs of Assam Movement.

This year, Assam has experienced a devastating flood. The floods have caused massive damage in different parts of the State. The floods have claimed a number of lives and severely affected economic activities and damaged physical infrastructure in the State. The wildlife too suffered. I would like to assure the people of Assam that our Government has taken every possible step to deal with the flood situation promptly and ensured expeditious relief and rescue operations. Steps have been taken to ensure that relief materials reach the flood affected people in time. Ex-gratia are also paid expeditiously to the kin of those who lost their lives in the present floods. The State Government is also committed to take up restoration and rehabilitation works in a time bound manner.

In this context I would like to express my gratitude to the Honourable Prime Minister for his visit to the State to take stock of the flood situation. We presented before the Honourable Prime Minister several thoughts and ideas for permanent solution to perennial flood problem of Assam. The root cause of Brahmaputra's flood is the large amount of silt and sand carried by the rivers from neighbouring States. As a result, the river bed of Brahmaputra is rising gradually and reducing its water carrying capacity. The prime cause of increasing silt and sand carried by rain water is the deforestation in the neighbouring States. We have apprised the Honourable Prime Minister of the matter during his recent Guwahati visit. He assured us of his full support and cooperation towards finding lasting solution to the problem by taking up the matter with our neighbouring States and Bhutan. The central Government has also provided Rs. 100 crore for detailed study for a permanent solution to this problem.

I am happy to inform you that State Finances are now healthy and stable because of your support and Government's well-defined policies. After our Government came to power, the financial resources of the State have shown significant improvement. Various fiscal measures adopted by the Government have been yielding favourable results and there has been significant increase in revenue generation. It may be mentioned here that the total State's own revenue collection in 2016-17 has increased to Rs. 15620 crore against Rs. 12848 crore in 2015-16. This is 21.60% more than the previous year. There has also been significant improvement in utilization of funds. The plan expenditure has increased to 64.46% in 2016-17 against only 37% in 2015-16. Similarly, total fund released from the State exchequer in 2016-17 was Rs 53,562 crore against only Rs. 39,805 crore in 2015-16. This is 34.56% more than previous year. This is a remarkable achievement in the financial history of the State.

Assam is proud to become the first State in the country to ratify the constitutional Amendment Bill for GST. Under the new GST regime, the dream of uniform tax structure in the entire country has been fulfilled and this will result in significantly reducing diversion of trade and commerce. Subsequently, it will bring buoyancy in our tax revenue. As there is no provision of entry tax under the GST Act, our Government has abolished all inter-state check gates w.e.f. 31st July, 2017.

Our Government has taken several initiatives for encouraging industrial development in the State, creating employment opportunities and also for projecting Assam as a preferred investment destination. Keeping this in view, the Assam Ease of Doing Business Act is enacted,

a single window agency has been created and a Land Bank has also been set up. As a result of sustained efforts of our Government, a large number of companies like Patanjali, Dabur, Hindustan Unilever have set up new units, bringing in investment of more than Rs. 6500 crore during last one year.

The Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Sri Narendra Modi declared the "Act East Policy" for establishing a commercial link between the North East including Assam and the South East Asian countries so as to enable the North Eastern Region to become economically vibrant. Our Government has created a separate department called Department of "Act East Policy Affairs" in order to make our State the gate way to South-East Asian countries through the proper implementation of "Act East Policy."

Our Government firmly believes that Assam can attain enduring prosperity only through regeneration of rural economy. The farmers, weavers, artisans and entrepreneurs can together make our growth sustainable. Focus of our Government, therefore, has always been on agriculture and allied sectors. Keeping this in view a Mega Mission 'Chief Minister's Samagra Grammya Unnayan Yojana' has been launched under which Rs. 30,000 crore are proposed to be invested in 25,425 villages of the state, over a period of five years, with an objective of doubling the farmers' income. The main component of investment will be the core economic-centric activities, such as Agriculture, Plantation, Fishery, Handloom, Sericulture, Dairy, Poultry, Cottage Industry including processing and market linkage. It is proposed to form at least one SHG in each village comprising 10 youths and every such group will be provided with one tractor.

State Government has stressed the need of uniform development of Barak and Brahmaputra Valleys, hills and plains of Assam. We are also laying utmost importance on the improved transport and communication system of Barak Valley. Since independence, a total length of 380 K.M. National Highways has been constructed in Barak Valley. On the other hand, our Government has taken steps to declare a total length of 395 K.M. new highways in Barak Valley. Moreover, the State Government has decided to set up "Swami Vivekananda Cultural and Research Centre" in Barak Valley for promotion of cultural activities in Barak Valley. The State Government has also decided to organise "Namami Barak" festival in line with "Namami Barhmaputra" with a view to highlighting and projecting the might and potential of Barak river in the country and across the world.

Similarly, the State Government has also given special importance to the all round development of those areas covered under Autonomous Councils, including hill areas of the State. In order to strengthen the infrastructure of B.T.C. area, our Government has allotted an amount of Rs. 200 crore as one time grant in 2017-18 over and above assistance under SOPD. An amount of Rs. 25 crore has been provided for the development of educational infrastructure of B.T.C. Likewise, a special onetime grant of Rs. 50 crore has been provided for various developmental works of areas belonging to Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council. On the other hand, another special onetime grant of Rs. 20 crore has also been provided to the Dima Hasao Autonomous Council.

One of the primary duties of the Government is to provide access to quality health care for the all its citizens. Keeping this in mind, we have launched two important schemes namely 'Chief Minister's Free

Diagnostic Service' and 'Atal Amrit Yojana'. Through Chief Minister's Free Diagnostic Service, Government has ensured availability of a number of diagnostics services namely, CT Scan, X-Ray and Laboratory services free of cost to all the citizens. Under the scheme, more than 1 lakh 20 thousand beneficiaries have been benefitted till date. On the other hand, through the 'Atal Amrit Yojana', people suffering from cancer, kidney disease, brain and heart-related ailments and burn injuries can get treatment through empanelled network of hospitals both inside and outside the State. Under the scheme, 3240 nos. of beneficiaries have been benefitted in 2016-17.

I am happy to inform that the cancer hospital at Guwahati Medical College & Hospital has been made functional. Administrative approval has been accorded for setting up of new medical colleges at Dhubri, Nagaon and North Lakhimpur.

In Elementary Education Sector, our Government has taken a number of initiatives to expand and strengthen the elementary education in the State. In order to revitalize elementary education of the State, we have appointed more than 12 thousand teachers during last one year. Free Text books have been provided to over 59 lakh elementary school students.

Our Government has also taken steps to waive the examination fees of students of the poorer section of the society and thereby 3.93 lakh students have been benefitted. For the first time, our government has distributed 108 lakh free textbooks amongst 7.66 lakh students of Class-IX & X. Similarly, admission fees have been waived for 2.03 lakh students of higher education.

One of the major achievements during the tenure of our Government is the completion of India's longest Dholla-Sadiya bridge across the river Brahmaputra. This bridge will trigger a new economic revolution in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and the entire Northeast. It has opened up doors for economic development. Dholla-Sadiya Bridge is named as 'Dr Bhupen Hazarika Setu'. Another new bridge over Brahmaputra was also inaugurated at Guwahati in January 2017. Opening of this bridge has ended the long traffic jams at Jalukbari and greatly benefitted the people of Assam. Construction of an additional two lane bridge near Koliabhomora Bridge and Bogibeel road cum Rail Bridge are going on in full swing.

Cleanliness is Godliness. It depicts order and harmony. As a tribute to the father of nation, and to put focus on cleanliness and sanitation in the entire country, the Honourable Prime Minister of India, Sri Narendra Modi launched the Swachh Bharat Mission on 2nd October, 2014. To realize the Prime Minister's vision in the State, steps have been taken for improvement of Sanitation facilities in households, public places and adopting Solid and Liquid Waste Management interventions in the villages. In order to improve the sanitation system, for the first time, we were able to provide low cost sanitary toilets to 10.50 lakh rural families last year. We have already declared about our efforts to make our State Open Defecation Free within 2017 by providing sanitary latrines to 15 lakh rural families. I am happy to say that Kamrup(M) District has become the first ODF district in the State. I congratulate the people of Kamrup(M) District for achieving this honour. I also congratulate the Deputy Commissioner, Kamrup(M) and all the officials connected with this effort.

Our Government has emphasized conservation of natural environment, maintaining the rich bio-diversity. Accordingly, our Government adopted Zero tolerance policy on encroachment in forest land. Illegal trade of rhino and other wildlife have been strictly dealt with and steps have been taken for speedy disposal of the cases relating to forest and wildlife crimes. As many as 9 poachers have been convicted by the newly set up ten different fast track courts. To make environment pollution free, the Government has decided to take plantation in a big way. More than 1 crore 42 lakh seedlings have been planted under various programmes during last one year. The State Government has a target of planting 10 crore seedlings this year. These saplings will provide adequate fruits, flowers & medicines when they grow up providing more green coverage in the State. The scheme has been launched during Van Mahotsov at Kaliabor.

Several steps have been taken by the State Government for preservation and promotion of the diverse culture and heritage of the State by preserving and promoting the art-culture and architecture of various tribes and communities. An amount of Rs 21 crore has already sanctioned for development of 37 Nos. of "Satra"s and another Rs 25 crores Rupees have been granted separately to 140 Nos. of "Satra"s. Steps are being taken to free the 'Satra' land from encroachment. Steps are also planned to motivate young generation by the ideals of National heroes and legends. The State Government has started organising the Memorial Day functions of the State Heroes and pioneers at the places related to their memories, so as to inculcate a new sense of belongingness. A Statue of Veer Lachit Barphukan has been unveiled at the Army Base, Dinjan. Steps have been initiated for erection of a Statue of Veer Chilarai at Rakhaldubi in Bongaigaon District. A Cultural Assimilation Park reflecting the myriad cultural aspects of our diverse tribes and ethnic

groups is planned at Dhola with a land area of 200 Bighas. It will be a tribute to Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, the legend.

The "Namami Brahmaputra Festival" was organised recently at 27 places in 21 districts to showcase our diverse and rich culture, natural wealth, wildlife and the tourism potential to the whole world. Flow of tourists to our State has significantly increased due to multiple efforts of our Government and is expected to see further rise in the coming days.

Steps have been taken to develop the Sports sector so that that the future generation of youth are benefitted in this direction. State Government will make all out efforts for promotion of Sports activity throughout the Barak-Brahmaputra Valley, hills and plains and tea garden areas. Efforts will also be made to strengthen the bond of brotherhood among the people of the State through Sports. Infrastructure development, training facility, provision of Sports goods and organisation of tournament etc. are undertaken to promote Sports. To encourage Sportspersons, the State Government has decided to enhance the number of Sports Pension beneficiaries from the present 20 Nos. to 40 nos. Due to our active efforts, Guwahati city has been selected as a venue for the Under-17 FIFA World Cup Football to be held in October, 2017. Similarly, Guwahati will also host the World Women Boxing Championship during the current year. These international competitions will specially help in achieving the goals of the State Government to develop Guwahati as the Sports Capital of the country. Moreover, the State Government has planned to organise a special rural sports event to promote the traditional sports of the State. Likewise, for the development of the cultural sector, the State Government has planned a special convocation for the actors, directors, producers and technicians. I am happy to inform you that Assam secured 6th place in the country in 'Khelo India' tournament.

Our Government has been giving utmost thrust towards all round socio-economic development and welfare of the tea-tribes community. Various steps have been taken in this direction. In the first year of the Government, almost 10,000 students have been given scholarships. With a view to encourage the tea-tribes youth towards sports, "Chief Ministers Inter Tea Garden Football Tournament" amongst all the tea-gardens of the State was organised recently. Initiative taken for inclusion of all the tea-garden workers under 'Digital India' Programme is one of our greatest achievements. Recently, services of 80 Mobile Medical Units have begun for extending medical services to the tea-tribes residing in the tea gardens of the State.

I take the opportunity to extend my heartfelt thanks to the tea garden workers for extending their cooperation after demonetisation. After demonetisation, around 8 lakh bank accounts have been opened for the tea garden workers to deposit their wages. As a mark of recognition to the role played by Tea Garden workers, the State Government has decided to deposit Rs. 2,500 in the bank accounts of those tea garden workers who are receiving their wages through banks and if they continue to receive their wages through banks accounts in future too, then Government will further deposit Rs. 2,500 in those bank accounts.

Our Government has been implementing various schemes for the socio-economic development of the minority communities of the State. After assuming charge, our Government has sanctioned schemes amounting to Rs. 415 crore under MSDP for the welfare of the minority people of the State. This fund is significantly higher in comparison to earlier years. For the very first time, our government has started survey in the char areas of the State. For improving the connectivity of the char areas with the mainland and enabling the people of these areas with

better transport system, we are giving thrust on development of the inland water transport service in the char areas.

Media is the Fourth Pillar of Democracy. Hence, we are committed for the welfare of the media persons. The Government has initiated a new Pension scheme for the senior journalists who have attained the age of 60 years. The State Government has also decided to extend one time ex-gratia of Rs. 5 lakh as financial assistance to the families of the journalists who are killed by extremists while on duty.

Hon'ble Prime Minister has introduced a new scheme, entitled "Ujjwala" to preserve the natural eco-system and to reduce the toil of the women by providing LPG connection to the poor at a very nominal price. The implementation of the scheme has begun in our State and so far more than one lakh families of the State have been provided with free LPG connections.

Our Government believes that problems of unemployment can be tackled through skill development. Hence, our Government has taken massive initiatives for skill development. A new Department called "Skill, Employment and Entrepreneurship Development" has been created by bifurcating the Labour and Employment Department and this year 1.50 lakh youths will be trained under these initiatives.

Today, on this auspicious occasion, once again I would like to reiterate our commitment to continue to strive to transform Assam into one of the most robust and vibrant States in the country. We are hopeful that in coming days, with the active cooperation and support from all sections of the society, we will be able to take our State towards new horizon of peace and prosperity.

— x x x —

Printed at the Assam Government Press, Guwahati-21