

Speech for the Hon'ble Governor at the event titled 'Physical and Social infrastructure for Regional Development' to be held at Hotel Taj Vivanta, Guwahati on May 14, 2018

Dignitaries on and off the dais, dear media friends and ladies and gentlemen present here. It gives me immense pleasure to be addressing this esteemed gathering in this very important assembly. This is indeed a significant moment for Assam. I particularly thank the organiser for having chosen the topic which is very important in view of our government's vision of inclusive growth.

As a core component of our cooperative federalism, the Government, at the Centre as well as in most of the states, are now putting a lot of emphasis on infrastructure development in order to boost economic growth and generate gainful employment. A wide range of business opportunities are being created as part of an inclusive development strategy.

I am happy that the Ministry of Finance, the Research and Information System for Developing Countries(RIS) and FICCI considered holding this conference in this city of Guwahati, which is considered the gateway to the North East and is poised to become a gateway to the South East Asian countries.

The theme, physical and social infrastructure for regional development in the North East also opens the scope for in-depth discussions on regional disparities, and identifying the nature of investments that can help to strongly link the geographically strategic states of the North East to the mainland of the country. In the Central government Budget announcement in February this year, it was estimated that investments of over Rupees fifty lakh crore is required in the coming years to increase the country's GDP growth and ensure greater connectivity through a network of roads, airports, railways, ports and inland waterways.

I feel happy to share with you that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has put Assam and other North Eastern states on resurgent growth track. In concurrence of Assam's ambition to be the gateway to South East Asia, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has sanctioned Rs. 1,26,000 crore for the development of roads and infrastructure in Assam. The Government has also taken ambitious project to make the National Waterways 2 and 16 in Assam more navigable to allow big ships to navigate and help Assam's access to the sea route. Our initiative to develop waterways up to Chittagong Port, Bangladesh will also boost economic activity in Assam.

I must tell you that the Government of Assam passed the Ease of Doing Business Bill 2016 in the first Assembly Session itself. Now registration and clearances for setting up of industries can be obtained online through a single window clearance system. Assam was also the first state to approve the GST bill. To create a conducive business environment, a land bank has been set up to expedite land allotment process to create industrial infrastructure and set up industries.

The last year's state budget had announced the City Infrastructure Development Fund for improving the urban infrastructure in six large cities, (except Guwahati) of the state. The preparatory works on Urban Infrastructure development in these cities is progressing very fast and 2018-19 will see a number of new urban infrastructure coming up in these cities.

This year, we intend to additionally focus on the middle-tier towns, and accordingly propose to bring eight new towns under the scheme. These eight new towns are Bongaigaon, Dhubri, North Lakhimpur, Karimganj, Goalpara, Sivasagar, Barpeta and Golaghat. Our commitment for each town will be Rs. 100 crore each over the next three years.

Moreover, the government has also announced Axom Mala Programme for State Highway and Major District Road Improvement and Reconstruction. The budget for 2018-19 has earmarked an initial amount of Rs. 200 crore for the project.

You will be glad to know that the Centre's budgetary allocation on infrastructure for 2018-19 was hiked to nearly Rupees six lakh crore against estimated expenditure of around Rupees five lakh crore in 2017-18.

Assam is considered to be the heart of Centre's Act East Policy. Moreover, the State's strategic location has made it the centre of the South East Asian markets.

North East is the fastest growing region in the world and enjoys the reputation of having the best emerging markets. Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN) could boost international connectivity by making Guwahati the hub for India-ASEAN relations.

Under UDAN around 20 unused airstrips and three under-served airports at Jorhat, Dibrugarh and Tezpur will be upgraded to increase air connectivity not only with the rest of the country but also with Southeast Asian countries. The Civil Aviation Ministry has provided Rs 1,100 crore for a new international terminal at Guwahati airport.

There is a motorable road link, the ASEAN trilateral highway connecting North East with ASEAN countries which aims at boosting bilateral trade between North East and South East Asian countries. The Government of India is working to improve this land route.

I must tell you that in the context of regional development, the development of North East requires special focus considering the region's aspiration to be in the mainstream of the country. The region is a land bridge between South Asia and South East Asia, and shares borders with countries including Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal and China. Among the major projects being implemented, include Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project, Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor, East West Corridor that is part of the Golden Quadrilateral, Border Haats and Rhi-Tiddim Road Project.

The North East can contribute to the prosperity of the whole of India if the potential of the region can be meaningfully harnessed. This strategically important region is also home to abundant natural resources. Therefore, the regional development strategy needs to include conscious steps to ensure optimal value realisation out of these resources.

An important initiative of the Centre that is fitting in the context of regional development is the 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' programme to expedite the transformation of some of the most underdeveloped districts in India.

Addressing the developmental deficit faced by the North East cannot be done without the help of massive investments. Though private capital has a crucial role to play, emphasis on optimising social profit has to be maintained by public sector financial institutions.

While the Centre and the state governments make certain expenditures, they also need to identify the gaps that require investments, and then provide a framework for attracting institutional finance in those critical gap areas.

It is to be noted that successful regional development hinges on connecting remote areas through physical infrastructure as well as by making greater investment in social infrastructure like health, education etc.

Taking into account the larger pool of work forces in the region, priority needs to be given to ensure greater participation of all sections of people

including women in the development process. Such approaches can help taking forward our avowed objective of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas.

Thank you
Namaskar

Jai Hind