



PRESS RELEASE

Speech delivered by Shri Om Birla, Speaker of Lok Sabha at the inaugural function of the Outreach and Familiarization Programme for Local Bodies of the State of Meghalaya and other North Eastern States on 26th February 2021.

Hon. Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Dr. Conrad K. Sangma ji;

Hon. Speaker of Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, Shri Metbah Lyngdoh ji;

Hon. Minister of District Council Affairs Department in the Meghalaya Government, Shri Lakhmen Rymbui ji;

Distinguished Members of Local Bodies of Meghalaya and other North-Eastern States; Ladies and Gentlemen.



- It is a matter of immense pleasure for me to participate in this ‘Outreach Programme’ organized by the PRIDE for the local bodies of North-Eastern States in this panoramic city of North-East India, Shillong.
- The **PRIDE** has been organizing programmes for the Members of Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies, Officers of the State Governments and Secretariats of State Legislatures of the North-Eastern States.
- Today, Members of **the Autonomous District Council (ADC)** along with the representatives of the local autonomous bodies of the North-Eastern States as well as the Panchayat Representatives of the North-Eastern India have joined us here in this programme. I welcome you all.

- North East India is known across the world for its natural beauty, cultural diversities and hospitality.
- Meghalaya is known for maximum rainfall in the world and of course, for football as well. **Shillong Lajong Football Club** has given opportunity to a number of young players who are exhibiting their talent across the country today.
- **Today, we have assembled here to deliberate upon the ways and means to strengthen the functioning of Autonomous District Councils and Panchayati Raj Institutions at the grass root level.**
- **I, while talking to the representatives of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in Dehradun last month, had requested them that their functioning should be such that accountability of the executive could be ensured at the local level also.**
- Friends, today's topic of discussion is '**Panchayati Raj System / Autonomous District Council: Strengthening Decentralized Democracy**' which is quite topical and relevant.
- There are several provisions in our Constitution providing optimal opportunities for development of all the areas in the country. **North East India** is quite distinct from the geographical and socio-cultural point of view, therefore keeping it in view, a **special provision** for Autonomous District Council for these States has been made in the **Sixth Schedule of our Constitution.**
- **The prime objective of setting up of these Councils is to protect the rights of the tribal communities of the North East, provide them equal rights in the decision-making process and to ensure that their administration is carried out in accordance with their traditions and conventions.**
- In fact, **Autonomous District Council** functions as a mini legislative body, therefore, the objective of the discussion and dialogue held here, should be to ensure accountability of the Executive. You are directly elected by the people; therefore, people should be the focus of all your actions and programmes. You will have to develop necessary systems and procedures to achieve it.
- Autonomous District Council holds a pivotal place in the process of local development. Their Members have full knowledge of the strengths of local areas which can be optimally utilized for their socio-economic development.

- **The Union Government also intends to give a boost to the local area development through ‘Vocal for Local’.**
- **The Act East Policy has opened up immense possibilities for the development of North-East.**
- **You need to be prepared to tap the new opportunities to their maximum.**
- **Local Self Government is a symbol of both democracy and development. It provides a framework for decentralisation of democracy.**
- **It strengthens the democracy at the grass root level through which citizens get an opportunity to become a stakeholder in the local self government of their area.**
- **Mawlynnong village in East Khasi Hills, which is regarded as the cleanest village of India, is the best example of this. This could be made possible only due to the efforts of the local bodies.**
- **Rashtrapita Mahatma Gandhi believed that the soul of India lives in villages. He believed in rural self government and the development of the nation (Rashtrodaya) through the development of the villages (Gramodaya). He believed that every village should be self reliant.**
- **The Government is formulating policies and schemes to make this very “self - reliance” a nationwide phenomenon. But, a self reliant India can only be possible when we are “Vocal for Local”.**
- **Villages here are capable of formulating a new model of self-reliance and development based on their finest handicrafts, architecture and other art forms which can be supported by the elected local bodies.**
- **A number of innovations are being made to bring local government in tune with today’s requirements. The means of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is also being utilised optimally.**
- **E-Panchayat has been introduced which has brought revolutionary changes in the working of local self government. I would like to urge that the ADCs and Panchayati Raj Institutions should also make maximum use of the means of ICT and digital innovation in its functioning so that the administration could be made more transparent, accountable and accessible to the people.**
- **Friends, every region of our country is enriched with diversity and uniqueness in itself. Each region has its own needs about which the local people can understand better and offer solutions for the same.**

- **It is necessary that District Councils and Panchayati Raj Institutions should deliberate upon the developmental programmes encompassing the concept of inclusive growth, co-operation and collectivism and address the issues keeping people at the centre.** The success of democracy is reflected in the delivery of benefits arising out of development to the last person of society.
- Your system may be different but the purpose is to serve the people and ensure their welfare. **Fulfilment of Regional Aspiration and National Integration are equally important to strengthen the democracy.** Let our every efforts be in the national interest and in the interest of every citizen of the country.
- Be it **Panchayati Raj Institutions or Autonomous District Council**, the prime objective of every institution is to address the issues facing the masses through democratic discussion and dialogue. This calls for developing a system of dialogue and discussion and it is also necessary to share the best practices of each other.
- There are a number of villages, village Panchayats in our country which have chalked out ideal, social and economic models for all round development as per their specific geographical and socio-economic conditions and **established best practices to follow.**
- **It should be our endeavour that all the Panchayats and local bodies may formulate a nation-wide system to share their knowledge, experience and best practices among themselves.**
- There is a good number of Local Bodies which have done a good work and developed a new model in the field of education, health, organic farming and employment.
- There is also a need to discuss and have dialogue as to how these models can be utilized in a better way by customizing them in line with different geographical conditions.
- **In a democratic set up solution to all the problems can be achieved through constructive discussion and dialogue. The purpose of my visit here is to strengthen the process of discussion and dialogue.**
- Meghalaya is known for its living root bridge. You all too will have to act as a bridge between the people and executive so that the problems of masses may be brought to the notice of the executive effectively and in turn, the executive may act to cater to the needs of the masses. Only then we can serve the people in real sense.

- **The sense of collectivism is our real power. We have witnessed that we faced the Corona pandemic unitedly. As long as we are united, we can overcome any problem. The nation is strong as long as we are united.**
- Parliament is the supreme democratic institution. Our goal is to evolve a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for all the Panchayati Raj Institutions and other local bodies of the country after a comprehensive discussion. **It is our responsibility to make a collective effort to make democracy strong, transparent and accountable.**
- Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to you all for attending this programme here and I hope that this programme will prove very useful to all. I would also request you all to share your views and suggestions to make this programme a success.
- I would like to assure you that we would be organising such programmes in future also and would extend all the necessary support.
- I wish you all a very happy new year.

Thank you, Jai Hind.