

**Speech of Prof. Jagadish Mukhi, the Honourable Governor of Assam on 69<sup>th</sup> Plenary of North Eastern Council to be held on 23-24 January, 2021 at Shillong, Meghalaya**

Hon'ble Home Minister, Government of India cum the Chairman, North Eastern Council  
Shri Amit Shah ji.

Hon'ble Governors of North Eastern States

Hon'ble Chief Ministers of North Eastern States

Hon'ble Minister for DONER

Hon'ble Members of North Eastern Council

Hon'ble Ministers of North Eastern States

Secretary Ministry of DONER

Secretaries of Other Ministries of Government of India

Chief Secretaries of North Eastern States

Secretary NEC

Senior Officers from Government of India, State Governments and Other Organizations

Ladies and Gentleman

It is a matter of great privilege for me to address this august gathering of distinguished leaders, senior Government officials and most importantly the Chairman of 69<sup>th</sup> Plenary, Hon'ble Union Home Minister, Shri Amit Shah ji.

India has been able to continue with its developmental agenda, even during this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic situation under the leadership of our visionary Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji. We, in Assam are also able to maintain this momentum and

successfully handle this pandemic situation because of continuous support from Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Modi ji and Shri Amit Shah ji.

69<sup>th</sup> Plenary of North Eastern Council has a significant role in the present context, as we, the North Eastern states get an opportunity to review our performances at a common platform and apply our minds to prepare road map and decide strategies for development of the region. We would be discussing the issues like thrust areas, state specific special needs and projects, developmental packages, strategies for focussed development, setting up of long term goals and formulate policies for implementation, etc. I hope we will be able to take the benefit of presence of Hon'ble Home Minister/ Chairman of NEC to flag and address the important issues affecting the North Eastern States.

The state of Assam and Guwahati in particular, is strategically located in NE region. Guwahati is the gateway of North Eastern (NE) states and other NE states could be reached easily either by road or by air from Assam. The neighbouring states thus are also being benefitted from the infrastructures created in Assam especially the Roads (National Highways and state roads), Rail Network, Water Ways, health care facilities, educational institutions, storehouses, cold storages, etc. I, therefore request NEC to take up bigger projects on core areas having multi-state impact in Assam.

We are facing difficult times because of COVID-19 pandemic prevailing in the country and throughout the world. New jobs are very limited and sizeable workforce has lost their jobs, and businesses have not returned to pre-Covid level. I, therefore, request the august gathering to find newer employment opportunities, for gainful employment of the youths, especially the educated unemployed in the region.

COVID-19 pandemic otherwise has also created a sizeable demand of health services and health service personnel in the state. To meet the growing demand of health care services and shortage of health workers like doctors, nurses, paramedics, lab technicians, etc. I request, NEC to give more emphasis on creation of medical infrastructures, opening up of more paramedical institutions, nursing institutions, specialized laboratories, etc. in the region. These trained paramedics/ nurses etc. will not only meet the manpower shortage for north east but can also meet the demand for the other states.

During the COVID-19 pandemic many people have worked from home and for businesses, education and other services (including essential services), good internet connection has become essential. However, it is revealed that the internet connectivity in Assam in interiors places is not good. In order to improve network connectivity in the region, optical fibre connectivity proposed by North Eastern states is required with Cox Bazar landing station in Bangladesh. Therefore, it is requested again to look into the issue and resolve the same, so that North Eastern states can get better/faster internet connectivity.

Further a greater thrust on Digital economy and E-Governance upto the grassroots level is a crying need that the whole economy and NE in particular are looking to achieve and investment thrust should be in these areas.

Agriculture and allied sector has shown growth in recent years in Assam. In 2018-19, the contribution of Agriculture and allied sectors to GSDP was Rs.36,662 crores, this was 15.8% to the state GDP however the percentage of people involved in this sector is still high at about 80% in the state. The sectoral growth was mainly because of farm mechanisation, assured irrigation, more use of appropriate fertilizers, use of better seeds of High Yielding Varieties (HYV) and soil treatment. Besides Agriculture, the state has a huge potential in horticulture, floriculture, spices, organic farming etc. I, therefore request NEC to outlay more funds on these sectors.

Assam is rich in bamboo and it is found abundantly in the state. It is also one of the priority sectors of NEC. Keeping the importance of bamboo, the Government of Assam has done policy reform recently by declaring bamboo as Agricultural product instead of forest product. This policy reform will ease the production and procurement of bamboo as raw material. Development of bamboo and cane sector for instance have a common interest across North East region.

Sizable quantity of tea produced in Assam is produced by small tea gardens / growers. In the year 2018, 44% tea production was by the small tea growers in the state. This sector creates and has potential to create more employment and economic opportunities and hence, I request NEC to give attention to this sector as well.

Animal husbandry and veterinary sector has an immense potential in the state. In 2019, milk, meat and egg production in the state were 945.92 million litres, 5042 thousand tonnes and 5015 lakhs respectively but the state is still short in production. The NE region has huge demand for these items and our neighbouring countries are also having similar demand. Therefore, to meet the demand, I request NEC to focus on milk, meat and egg production along with processing units, feed mills, construction of healthy and hygienic meat slaughter houses, etc.

Fishery is another sector with tremendous potential. The state is mostly plain (unlike other NE states) and there are natural water bodies and climatic condition is also conducive for fish production. The demand supply gap is huge in the state and in year 2019-20 the state has imported 20,073 tonnes of fish from other states. To meet this shortage Government of Assam has taken up many schemes under Chief Ministers Samagra Gram Unnayan Yojana. I also request NEC to give more attention to this sector to enhance the fish production in the region.

Assam has immense tourism potential, mainly in wildlife, birds, natural and scenic beauty, rivers, water-falls, etc. The tourism in Assam can be dovetailed with the tourism of the neighbouring North Eastern States by developing different tourism circuits. This sector also has employment generation opportunity and I therefore request NEC to invest more on development of tourism infrastructures, home stay facilities, eco-tourism, tea tourism, etc. in the State as well as in all the North-Eastern States.

Respected Chairman sir, our state is the biggest state amongst 8 NE states, as we house 3.5 crores people. My state faces perennial flood and erosion problem. Till date we have lost 4.27 lakh hectares of land due to river erosion and about 1.25 lakhs people have been rendered homeless. It is my humble request to Hon'ble Chairman NEC to consider to allot more funds for flood and erosion protection in the state.

As we are connected well with other NE states through rail, road and air modes and our infrastructure benefits other NE States as well therefore, I request NEC to increase funding, especially normative allocations for Assam to the tune of Rs.300-400 crores per year from current allocation of only Rs.52 crores in the year 2020-21.

I have mentioned only a few key concerns of the State of Assam, because of time constraints. I hope during discussions over today and tomorrow, many more important issues may emerge. I am confident that this Plenary shall give us new ideas and better approach for faster, more equitable and sustainable development of the North Eastern region. I urge North Eastern Council to provide support for development of the region so that the people of the region could feel at par with developed states of India in terms of development.

The COVID-19 situation and even before, since launch of Act East Policy, initiatives like Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal(BBIN) and Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand-Economic Cooperation(BIMST-EC) grouping involving India especially North East India with surrounding nations of South and South East Asia have shown that these organizations and NE States would realize their true potential only if integration of NEI States amongst themselves and seamless economic integration with rest of India is achieved early. In order to achieve same, NEC will have to be a bridge which can be accelerated through a robust platform- a NEC web portal that is dynamic and collects data from grassroots and shares data amongst all stake holders. The portal will source and share data. This may kindly be looked into.

I conclude by conveying my thanks and best wishes to Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region and North Eastern Council for giving me the opportunity to share my thought and concern.

Jai Hind.