

Text of the Vice-President's interaction with the Self Help Group (SHG) Members of Meghalaya (Excerpts)

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Hon'ble Chief Minister, young, dynamic, very committed, and hundred percent pro-your gender, Shri Conrad Sangma.

I know you as Chief Minister when he was a child. He has grown under a banyan tree. One of the tallest leaders of this country, Shri P. A. Sangma Ji, such a lovable human being. He was Speaker of Lok Sabha and your Chief Minister. For me, it's emotional moment on two counts. One that he is Chief Minister of Meghalaya. In Sanskrit, Meghalaya is known as 'abode of clouds.' And secondly, I am grateful to you, you responded to my invitation.

I travelled all the way to Meghalaya to speak to you and invite you. I am therefore, happy and delighted when I see the headgears of Garo, Jaintia, and Khasi tribes. Our tribal culture is resplendent. Our tribal culture is reflecting our ethnicity, our tribal culture is our wealth. At the moment, we take pride for the first time, the President of India is a tribal woman, a global milestone, a great history.

Distinguished members of the 'Self Help Group' and, as the Hon'ble Chief Minister said, the officials, because the vision is translated into ground reality by commitment of officials. I'm happy to note that it is the visionary leadership that catalyses the officials to act in the right direction. Fortunately, in our country, this is happening for the last decade, and it is happening in your state also.

Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Modi, the country in the last decade has achieved milestones that are the envy of the world in economy, infrastructure, technology and women empowerment. Epochal development took place when Parliament provided for reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislatures to the extent of one-third. So, the reservation is horizontal and vertical.

I'm so happy and delighted that all Women's Help Groups are contributing so massively, and I got the feel of it. I have received many portraits. They were remarkable, good paintings — my portraits. But the two that I received today are different, they have not used pastel colour. These have not used paper, it is handwork and so accurate. Congratulations to those who have done it.

First, I would like to congratulate your Chief Minister because, economy of a state is determined by Gross State Domestic Product, GSDP and that for your state has seen a rise of 13%. 13% rise year to year is very greatly commendable. Congratulations to the Chief Minister for his deep commitment to improve the economy of the state. Right now, it is projected to be more than 66,000 crores. Meghalaya is a large state when it comes to heart, but otherwise geographically not that large but size of your economy is good. I'm all the more happy, Hon'ble Chief Minister, you've set a great target and the target is the state is aiming for a 10 billion US dollar economy by 2028.

The state has enormous talent, enormous potential in tourism, in mining, in IT, in the service sector but what is more important is, human resource must be nurtured. Human resource must be independent and in that category also, societal growth, economic development, is balanced when women come forward. I am so happy and delighted that both with respect to the revolving fund, and remember, there is a tenfold increase during your tenure. Amazing!

I therefore would appeal to you, listen to what the Chief Minister has said. If you have a product, technology will help you market your product anywhere. Someone amongst you will have to get into the job, and you will make a very, very big leap.

North East is our jewel. In 90s, that is about three decades ago, the Government of India had a policy, and that policy was 'Look East.' Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave an additional dimension to this policy. 'Look East, Act East.' And that action has taken place very very effectively. Meghalaya, let me tell you, is heaven for tourists, bountiful gift of nature. Three or four places are such which I will be visiting next time, and soon enough.

Let me make one more observation which is universal. To empower the pocket of a person by freebies, by doles, is not true empowerment. True empowerment is that you handhold the person so that the person gets himself or herself empowered. That brings joy. That brings satisfaction. That gives you inner strength and that makes you proud of your families also.

I want to tell you with a firm resolve that whatever you are doing, you will multiply it. Bharat, we are a great nation. We are a nation unique in several ways. I want all of you to believe in the concept of nation always first. Our national interest has to be supreme. We cannot put our national interest to a level where political, partisan, personal, financial interest overtakes it. I recall that was the time when I was not in Delhi, I was in West Bengal as Governor but that was when national recognition for women-led 'Self Help Groups' took place. During the 2022 Republic Day parade in Meghalaya's tableau, showcasing women-led 'Self Help Groups' was there.

I noticed it at that point of time while watching the parade because of him. I was so happy but in the last six, seven years, the quantum jump that has taken place is remarkable. I am extremely delighted also to notice that the Hon'ble Chief Minister is acting in a discriminatory manner, tilting towards your side. That is happening, as was indicated, the mother and child have to be taken care of and that is assessed by one indicator, mortality, child mortality rate. Second indicator is the nutrition level.

I appeal to all of you to make it a point that we focus on these areas very effectively. The achievements in controlling child mortality are remarkable and this is easier said than done. It takes a lot of work, lot of commitment. I have personally come to know from Member of Parliament that the services you make available, particularly in the medical field, the mobility of that is remarkable.

You have to be also promoting tourism in a different way. Tourism is promoted by three aspects. One is natural, from that angle; Meghalaya is gifted land, god's land, heaven for tourists. Second, the people, if the people are warm-hearted, people are friendly, and then tourists get attached to that area. That tourist becomes your ambassador for further tourism. And third, which I love, your food, your environment and the moment you land in Meghalaya, you are lost in yourself with these combinations taking place. I look for a day when, like some countries in the world, the economy of Meghalaya will be driven by tourism. It has lot of potential and tourism would mean people involved in the tourism industry. I'm sure the Chief Minister is taking steps to empower people. How to be tourist-friendly, that is happening.

The integrated development in the state gives you an assured future, because assured future is provided by stable economic growth, social order, power availability and infrastructure growth that is taking place. The North East is our gateway for Far-East also. Therefore it matters but always has to be connected with the national capital. Therefore I take the opportunity, Hon'ble Chief Minister, I had extended an invitation to all your members of the Assembly also to visit this place and students also.

I would be happy and delighted to welcome them here, ! , 2022 Republic Day Parade tableau Vice-President 2 , , NCC , - pride , , ' '

Thank you so much.

JK/RC/SM

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