

KEY NOTE ADDRESS OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE INAUGURAL SESSION OF THE NATIONAL WEBINAR ON 24TH AUGUST, 2020, ORGANIZED BY DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR UNIVERSITY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, MADHYA PRADESH.

Shushri Usha Thakur ji,
Hon'ble Minister of Tourism, Culture and Adhyatm, Madhya Pradesh,

Prof. Asha Shukla,
Vice Chancellor, B.R. Ambedkar University of Social Sciences, Indore and

Dr. Neeru Misra,
Director, ICCR (Retd.),

It gives me an immense pleasure to know that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University of Social Sciences is organizing a National Webinar on the theme: **“Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat - Dekho Apna North East”** from August 24-29, 2020. Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi ji during the Rashtriya Ekta Divas address on 31st October, 2015, on the occasion of 140th birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, modern Architect of India, now popularly known as **“Unity Day”** announced that the Government of India proposes to launch a new initiative called **‘EK Bharat Shreshtha Bharat’**. The theme of this webinar, particularly **“Dekho Apna North East”** is quite relevant at this juncture. Being the Governor of one of the North Eastern States of India, I, on behalf of the people of NE States and on my own behalf, would like to share few points pertaining to the uniqueness of different cultures, traditions, religions and history of these States.

North East India, one of the most beautiful regions of India, also known as the **“Eight Sisters”** comprises Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. Mask Dance (Meghalaya) is a part of religious and cultural traditions. Naga Dance (Nagaland), Naga folk songs are both romantic and historical. Manipuri Ras Leela is famous not only in India but all over the world also. The North East is a magnificent & tragic tapestry of people, events & nature. You can be touched by its rivers, rain & mist, overwhelmed by the seeming gentleness of its people & stirred by its powerful & evocative history. There are not less than 220 ethnic tribes in the eight States comprising the region with a population of about forty million people. There are communities with kin in the neighbouring countries. Each tribe has its own distinct tradition of art, culture, dance, music and life styles.

Tourism is the fastest track for socio-economic development the world over. Its multiplier effect in employment generation is unmatched. Its vital role in poverty alleviation and economic growth is well-recognized. Here, Ima (Mother) Market only manned by women in the world is commendable and praiseworthy. The States of North East Region are blessed with nature's bounty. Their wooded mountains, deep gorges with winding rivers, rolling hills and lush green valleys are an exquisite picture of scenic beauty. The region is the treasure house of bio-diversity, flora and fauna. The colourful and rich heritage add to the beauty of the picturesque surroundings. In other words, it is "**Paradise Unexplored**" and ideal destination for the tourists, both domestic and international. The tremendous potential for tourism in the region needs to be exploited for the economic growth and prosperity of its people.

North Eastern India has been facing increasing challenges as it copes with pressures emanating from its ethnic diversity. The rising challenges of ethno-nationalism and erosion of the State authority pose an increasing threat to the National security. The present socio political scene in the North East thus underlines disturbing trends. According to an estimate, there are more than 40 insurgent groups operating in the region. Absence of credible conflict management mechanisms is evident from the situation which is deteriorating by the day. Widespread poverty and unemployment, increasing economic disparities as compared with the rest of the country and those within the region and growing corruption in public life are further adding fuel to the fire. Increasing mobilisation for economic and political space by more and more socio-economic groups is causing turbulence in an environment of limited resources and constrained capabilities of redistribution of wealth. Thus, the fear of identity is further compounded by a social security factor, which essentially boils down to protecting the land from outsiders and in some cases within the region from other ethnic groups.

Nevertheless, as you are all well aware, India's **Look East policy** represents its efforts to cultivate extensive economic and strategic relations with the Nations of Southeast Asia in order to bolster its standing as a regional power and a counterweight to the strategic influence of the People's Republic of China. Initiated in 1991, it marked a strategic shift in India's perspective of the world. It was developed and enacted during the Government of Prime Minister Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao and rigorously pursued by the successive administrations of Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Dr. Manmohan Singh. Shri Narendra Modi ji, Hon'ble Prime Minister also

accorded high priority to turn India's erstwhile "Look East" policy into an "Act East" policy. Some important initiatives made by Government of Manipur and Central Government/Ministry of DoNER are, inter alia, introduction of bus service between Imphal and Mandalay (Myanmar) at least once a week during winter and non-rainy season, revival of border trades along Indo-Myanmar border in three locations, one in each border districts (Chandel, Ukhrul and Churachandpur), enhance another 15 more items under border trade in addition to 40 items already permitted for border trade between India and Myanmar, introduction of Rupee-Kyat Trade as permitted on the Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bhutan borders in order to facilitate formal Border Trade between India and Myanmar, etc.

Organization of such an important National Webinar at this critical juncture by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University of Social Sciences is indeed praiseworthy as the universe is now experiencing unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. I am fully confident that the efforts made by the University will go a long way for the benefit of the people as accomplished by Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel for the country.

Thank you,
Jai Hind.