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Address by the Hon'ble President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind on the occasion of inauguration of the northeast development summit

1. I am happy to be here at the inauguration of the Northeast Development Summit. This is my first visit to the region and to the state of Manipur since taking office as the President of India, and I am truly glad that it has coincided with this very important event.
2. I am sure the Summit will take enlightened and actionable decisions on the development of the Northeast not just from a domestic, Indian perspective – but also in the context of the neighbourhood. The development of the Northeast is tied with the development of India's neighbours and the countries of ASEAN. Friendly partner countries from other regions too are integral to our vision for the Northeast and can contribute substantially.
3. For a short period in our history, there has been a misconception about the eight states of the Northeast being a “frontier” of India. I say “short period of history” deliberately. After all, if you consider the hundreds and thousands of years of civilisation, far from being a frontier, the Northeast has been at the heart of Indian imagination. And if you take South Asia and Southeast Asia as a continuum – as it has been perceived for most of history – then the Northeast is right in the middle of it.
4. The Northeast is an amazing social and cultural ecosystem. Few regions of the world have such a wealth of cultural, ethnic and religious diversity packed into such a small area. This variety is an inspiration for all of us. The Northeast is home to some of the oldest indigenous communities in the world. It is one of our spiritual homelands. Whether it is the traditions of the Devi in Kamakhya or of Buddhism in Tawang and elsewhere, they make for a sacred bond that unites India with Southeast Asia. Christian missionaries have contributed to education here. And there is even a small but thriving Jewish community in Manipur and Mizoram.
5. Prosperity is the Northeast's natural destiny, its default position if I may put it so. Its geographical location makes it the obvious gateway to India, linking the vast economies of the Indian subcontinent and of today's ASEAN countries. This is the potential we have to tap. And this is the idea that must inspire this Summit.
6. Central to the Government of India's approach to the development of the Northeast is an urgent and speedy enhancement of connectivity. This is a multi-modal programme, across land, water and air. And it refers both to connectivity within India as well as to connectivity between India and its eastern and Southeast Asian neighbours.
7. In the past three years, railway lines have finally come to Arunachal Pradesh, fulfilling an old demand. An extensive development of railway links in the Northeast is under way, with investments totalling Rs 90,000 crore. Road building in the region is busier than it has ever been. Border roads, national highways and state roads are all being built or improved. Incorporated in July 2014, the **National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation** is working with a special focus on the Northeast. It is engaged in about 100 road projects in the region.
8. Inland waterways, especially along the majestic Brahmaputra and Barak rivers, can both save transport costs as well as facilitate connectivity. And finally, there is the push for air connectivity. The creation of infrastructure in smaller cities and airports, along with more and more flights, is making the skies of the Northeast buzz with traffic.
9. In the broader neighbourhood, initiatives such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway and the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project are critical for many of our countries and for the Northeast. The Northeast is also the corridor for so many trade and connectivity projects on the **Bangladesh Bhutan India Nepal** [BBIN] and the **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation** [BIMSTEC] platforms. I would say that the states of the Northeast region are the true drivers of India's Act East policy.

Ladies and Gentlemen

10. Incorporated in March 2017, the **Northeast Tourism Development Council** is creating partnerships between government and private sector players. I am confident it will make the Northeast one of the leading tourism destinations of not just India but Asia. That is where it deserves to be.

Ladies and Gentlemen

11. The sense of connect with the Northeast gives every one of us in this room a stake in the region. It doesn't matter whether we are from the Northeast, from other parts of India or indeed from other countries connected by culture and geography, history and trade to the Northeast. The development of the Northeast is a shared enterprise.
12. Seeing the impressive degree of participation in this Summit – not only from Manipur and states of the Northeast, but from the rest of India and key partner countries – I am left extremely optimistic. I look forward to the deliberations between government officials, business-persons and other delegates at this Summit leading to fruitful results – and specific projects and outcomes.
13. In conclusion, I again emphasise that in the development of the Northeast is both the development of India – as well the true measure of the India-ASEAN partnership. The opportunity is before us. Let us grab it.

Thank you
Jai Hind!

AKT/SH/SK