

Gangtok, March 6: (IPR) The Seventh Session of the Ninth Assembly (Budget Session 2018-19) of the Sikkim Legislative Assembly which was presided over by Speaker, Sikkim Legislative Assembly, Shri K.N. Rai, commenced from today.

The General Budget for the State of Sikkim for the financial year 2018-19 was presented in the House by Chief Minister and Leader of the House Shri Pawan Chamling, who is also the Minister-in-Charge of Finance, Revenue & Expenditure Department, and Government of Sikkim. The General Budget to the tune of **Rs. 7051.09 Crore** was placed on the floor of the House. He presented before the House the Estimates of Receipts, Annual Financial Statement, Demands for Grants and Explanatory Memorandum to the Annual Budget 2018-19.

The discussion on the General Budget will take place on 7th March, 2018.

The Budget Session began with the address by Governor of Sikkim Shri Shrinivas Patil. In his address, the Governor stated that the Budget 2018-19 reflects the changing times and the aspirations of the people of Sikkim and also embodies the renewed commitment of the Government to better the performance for optimum public good.

He added that this year's Budget is oriented towards Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship where the Government has ear-marked funds for the Start up Schemes. The Chief Minister's Start up Scheme, a flagship scheme of the State Government, is not simply a youth-centric scheme but in the true sense, it is a meaningful and focused career-making golden opportunity, which aims to enable unemployed Sikkimese youth to become start up entrepreneurs and masters of their own business enterprises instead of seeking job opportunities elsewhere.

Laying stress on the initiative of the Government towards Organic Farming and allied activities, the Governor stated that the State is now entering into the second phase of Organic Mission, whereby the focus will be on increasing production, value addition, marketing and exploring of organic products. The vision of the Government is for organic revolution in the State and to make Sikkim a fully self sufficient and self reliant State in Organic produce. He appealed to the people not to leave their land fallow and grow suitable vegetables and crops, and to ensure their responsibility and accountability in sustaining the Organic Mission.

Speaking on the numerous Health initiatives of the State Government, the Governor stated that the people in Sikkim receive free quality health care services with manifold improvements in infrastructure, capacity building of human resource, and improved delivery of comprehensive health services. He stated that the 1000 bedded multi-specialty hospital Phase I coming up at Sichey is on the verge of completion. While speaking about the various health schemes being implemented by the Government, he stressed on a few such as introduction of HPV Vaccine against Cervical Cancer, TB-free Sikkim, and Scheme for increasing Total Fertility Rate.

On Human Resource development, the Governor stated that the Government has consistently laid emphasis on equipping students to face the challenges of an increasingly globalised and competitive world. It has taken necessary steps to provide requisite infrastructure and qualified teaching manpower in educational institutions.

He also mentioned that the Education Quality Improvement Programme (EQUIP) launched in eight pilot senior secondary schools in the State has been a resounding success by improving the overall culture of teaching and learning in these schools.

He also informed the House that the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has prepared a text book on Organic Farming which will be distributed shortly in all our schools, and will be taught from class VI onwards. The Government is also taking steps to introduce Organic Farming as a vocational subject under National Skill Qualification Framework.

On Forest and Environment, the Governor stated that the Government has constantly followed the path of eco-friendly developments for more than two decades, and has had an impressive record in environmental conservation and climate change mitigation action. Through these positive environmental actions, the Government of Sikkim has assumed national as well as international leadership in climate change mitigation.

On Socio-Cultural Preservation and Tourism, the Governor stated that the Government has always aimed to make Sikkim an ultimate eco-tourism destination which has been promoted under the brand of responsible travel keeping in view of future Sikkim. Special emphasis is being laid on practicing eco-tourism. The vision of the Government is to make tourism a key source of both income and employment in the State. He added that tourism is perceived as the driver of economic growth and a sector capable of bringing about immense socio-economic transformation of the region.

On Rural Development, the Governor stated that the Government accords special emphasis to the quality of life of the rural citizens. The developmental strategies such as creation of quality rural infrastructure, provisions of Basic Minimum Services such as water supply and sanitation, rural connectivity, foot bridges, and other amenities are designed keeping people's welfare in mind. The Governor made special mention about the Chief Minister's Rural Housing Mission and Prime Minister Gram Sadak Yojana and the Rural Livelihood Missions and their implementation in the State.

On Roads and Bridges, the Governor said that the Government has laid maximum thrust on improvement of the existing road network in the State, while also taking up new road construction wherever necessary. He added that connectivity through roads has made crucial contribution to economic development and growth including bringing important social benefits.

On Gallantry Awards, the Governor stated that the Government has consistently provided a number of benefits and welfares to the armed force personnel from Sikkim, their family members, and next of kin. The benefits are in the form of cash grants to the Gallantry Awards and Ex-Gratia Grant / Compensation to battle casualties.

The Governor also spoke elaborately on the long pending and pressing socio-political issues concerning the State of Sikkim.

After the Governor's address, Speaker Shri K.N. Rai reported the address of the Governor on the first day of the Budget Session 2018-19. Subsequently, the Chief Minister and also the

Leader of the House Shri Pawan Chamling moved the Motion of Thanks on the Governor's address. The Motion of Thanks was seconded by Minister HRDD, Law & PA & Sports & Youth Affairs Shri R.B. Subba. The discussion and voting on the address of the Governor would take place on 7th March, 2018.

During the Legislative Business, Minister for Water Security and Public Health Engineering Department Smt Tulshi Devi Rai introduced the Sikkim Water Supply and Water Charges (Amendment) Bill, Bill No. 4 of 2018. Discussion and voting on the Bill would take place on 8th March, 2018.

Chief Minister and Leader of the House, also the Minister-in-Charge of Finance, revenue & expenditure Department, in his address stated that the Government has been steadfast in pursuing the goals of comprehensive development, quality delivery of services, and promoting peace and harmony among the Sikkimese society. He said that the entire nation looks towards Sikkim as a model State for its most innovative and new programmes cutting across sectors. He said that the Government's goal is to provide ample opportunity to every Sikkimese youth and thus this year's Budget is youth centric and employment oriented.

He stated that the Government has been steadfast in pursuing the goals of comprehensive development, quality delivery of services and promoting peace and harmony among our Sikkimese society. Further, the Government has delivered on its promises establishing an enviable track record of development, which is solely because the people of Sikkim have shown an abiding faith in this Government, its policies and what it has stood for. Today the entire nation looks towards Sikkim as a model state for its most innovative and new programmes cutting across sectors. Other states in the country have started quoting Sikkim as an example. This is the result of our thinking, prudent action and honest purpose.

Chief Minister said that the Government's goal is to provide ample opportunity to every Sikkimese youth to achieve their economic and social dreams. Therefore, this year's budget is youth centric and employment oriented.

He stated that creating job opportunities and facilitating generation of employment has been at the core of our policy-making and during the last twenty-four years, the Government has taken a number of steps to boost employment generation in the State.

One of such scheme is the Chief Minister's Start up Scheme, CMSS, which envisages providing financial assistance in the manner that is better applicable and simpler in adoption by unemployed Sikkimese youth so as to ensure its success in a more meaningful way.

In order to recognize the contribution of soldiers, their bravery and gallantry and to motivate others to serve in the Army, the Government has enhanced cash award to Rs. 1 Crore for the Param Vir Chakra, Rs. 50 lakhs each for the Ashok Chakra and Mahavir Chakra and annuity of Rs. 1 lakh, Rs. 2 lakhs and Rs. 70,000 are provided to them w.e.f 15.01.18.

Similarly, Cash Awards have been enhanced for the Gallantry Awards namely, Vir Chakra to Rs. 20 lakhs, Kirti Chakra to Rs. 15 lacs and Saurya Chakra Rs. to 10 lakhs respectively.

Further, Cash Grants for the Sena Medal, Param Vishist Sewa Medal, Ati Vishist Sewa Medal, Vishist Sewa Medal, Mentioned-in-Dispatches, Sarvottam Yudh Sewa Medal, Uttam Yudha Sewa Medal & Yudh Sewa Medal have also been enhanced substantially.

The Government has enhanced Ex-Gratia Grant to Rs. 25 lakhs for the Battle Casualty (Fatal) and for the Battle Casualty (Non-Fatal) Rs. 5 lakhs is being provided and for "Veer Naris" (Wives of Late Soldiers) Rs. 2 lakhs is being granted.

Similarly, financial assistance amounting Rs. 6,000/- p.m each is provided to the World War-II Veterans and the Widows of World War-II Veterans. The Government has also been providing Welfare Grants of Rs. 1,500/- as Spectacle Allowance; Rs. 3,000/- as Financial Assistance, Rs. 2,000/- as Death relief; Rs. 500/- p.m as Orphan Rearing Allowance; Rs. 10,000/- as Medical Referral Grant (one time); Rs. 3,000/- p.a as Paying Guest/Hotelier allowance.

The Cash Grant for the Gallantry Award and the Ex-Gratia Grant to the Battle Casualties are the highest amongst all the States in the country, he stated.

Further, the Chief Minister Stated that the Government is also committed for the welfare of farmers. "We have effectively brought about paradigm shift in policy of Agriculture from inorganic to the organic farming. As an enterprise, agricultural system must help farmers produce more from the same land parcel at lesser cost and simultaneously realize higher prices for their produce. Our emphasis is also on generating productive and gainful on-farm and non-farm employment for the farmers and unemployed youths," he stated.

He added that the Government is focusing on capacity building of rural youth in organic tourism, production of organic seed and organic manure production, packaging, processing, value addition and branding of various agricultural crops.

Therefore, realizing the truth that integrating agriculture sector in the development process is fundamental for attaining inclusive growth, our government has accorded top priority to advancement of agriculture and horticulture sectors, he added.

The Chief Minister shared that within the next 5 years, Sikkim will achieve self-sufficiency in food grain production also. Today we are self-sufficient to fulfill domestic demands of vegetables, fruits and flowers. At present, we are also exporting large cardamom, ginger, turmeric, tea and orange to the national and international markets. In the next few years, we will augment production of vegetables etc and should be able to export these items outside Sikkim and also outside the Country.

He also said, that today, our main challenge is to change the mindset of our people and promote dignity of labour among them. Simultaneously, we are trying to diversify economic engagement into service sector and agriculture as lucrative and fashionable activities to attract new generation of Sikkimese. This will involve wide-ranging diversification including value addition, packaging and marketing, agro-based industries, export and tourism related activities.

On Cooperative movement in the State, the Chief Minister stated that the State has registered various co-operative societies like Educated Unemployed Youth, Labour and women in every ward of Gram Panchayat Unit and Urban Local Bodies.

On Rural development, he stated that the Government has fixed a target for conversion of 3,000 Kutch houses to Pucca houses under Chief Minister's Rural Housing Mission and another 1095 kutch houses to pucca houses under Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (Gramin) to ensure that every one in Sikkim will have his own pucca house.

Further, by the year 2019, all eligible habitations as per the 2001 Census in the State shall be connected by PMGSY roads.

Speaking on road connectivity, the Leader of the House stated that the Government has undertaken improvement of the pavements and strengthening works of the roads in two phases. In the first phase a length of 382.89 kilometres is being taken up. The project is targeted to be completed by the end of March 2018. In the second phase a length of 208.44 kilometres is proposed to be taken up. The Government has constructed more than 2977 kilometres new roads since the Government took over the reins in 1994.

Likewise, the Government aims to provide at least 40 litres or more per capita per day/ per person safe drinking water to rural households.

Speaking on Forest and Environment, the Chief Minister shared that in view of the manifested adverse impacts of Climate Change on the livelihood practices of people across the continents, it is time for everyone to come together and work collectively for our common goal. In Sikkim, we are upgrading our facilities to strengthen the State Knowledge Cell on Climate Change to determine impact on alpine ecosystems, glacier dynamics and high altitude lakes so that necessary remedial measures could be proposed to address the issues related to the vulnerability of Glacial Lake Outburst Flood phenomenon.

He also highlighted the initiatives taken by the Government to ensure quality health services for the people of Sikkim through quality infrastructure and sound manpower.

He further shared that the innovative CATCH programme is now adopted at the central level and named as National Communicable Disease (NCD) screening.

Further, he added that the State Government is particularly concerned about the vulnerable section of the society and has launched Mukhya Mantri Jeevan Raksha Kosh (MMJRK) where referral services are provided for tertiary medical care facility for the needy patients of Sikkim with financial implication of upto 3 lakhs.

He shared that the State Government has been promoting tourism in line with the Sustainable Development Goals by giving higher impetus to Rural Tourism so that the multiplier benefits of tourism reaches directly to the rural communities and contribute gainfully in rural income generation. Out of 736 Home Stay sanctioned earlier, more than 90% have been completed and made operational.

Speaking on Human Resource development, the Chief Minister stated that the Government has given consistent emphasis to the development of human resources and to equip our children to face the challenges of increasingly globalized and competitive world. The Government has taken necessary steps to provide the requisite infrastructure and qualified teaching manpower in all our schools and colleges with special emphasis on improvement of quality of teaching Institutions. Simultaneously, it is being ensured that all the ongoing construction projects specially the addition of infrastructure in various Secondary, Senior Secondary schools and colleges are completed as soon as possible.

He informed the House that Sikkim has become the first State in the entire Country to have partnered with United Nation Educational and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) MGIEP (Mahatma Gandhi Institution of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development) for embedding Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) in our Primary Text Books. This is in line with our demonstrated commitment towards organic farming and preparing responsible citizens of tomorrow.

In his address, the Chief Minister stated that Sikkim along with its people has traversed a long distance duly promoting and prospering under the principles of Democracy, rewriting history as we move ahead to break peoples' record and in many cases our own records. He also announced some of the new projects that have been recently initiated such as gyan mandir, folk healing centre, Statue of lord Parshuram, Asta-Chiranjivi Dham, Ethnic Cultural Centre, Magarjung Centre, Gaushala at Rhenock and Buriakhop, Lepcha Primitive Study Centre, Tamang & Sherpa Study Centre, Bhujel Study Centre, and Scheduled Caste Study Centre.

He stated that these centres will boost pilgrimage tourism as well and tourists will encounter a new vista of experimentation highlighting people's faiths and belief. As of today, we receive large number of tourists which are 3 times more than our state's population. Sikkim probably is the only State in India which receives as much visiting tourists on annual basis.

He stated that Sikkim is the only State in India to guarantee basic minimum needs to all citizens. “We have ensured housing for all and Sikkim is soon going to be the first kutcha house free state of India. We have provided drinking water, electricity and roads in all parts of the State. Education is free upto the University level and health services is free in the State. In fact, we have genuinely followed the principles of sustainable development and today we have realized almost all the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. Goals like No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Education, Gender Equality etc, have been already fulfilled in Sikkim.”

The Chief Minister stated that Sikkim has for long realized this essential truth and working judiciously to balance modernization and also preserve our tradition, culture and lifestyle. “The idea has been managing growth and usher in general well being while at the same time doing enough to meet the future needs through good environmental stewardship. Therefore, over the decades we have been able to bring about human development, social development, economic development and environmental development by inducing deep harmony between economic growth and environmental protection.”

He concluded that in the future, we need to be more discerning to try to further promote a just society through prudent management of our natural and human resources, provide livelihood through economic diversification and continue to provide to the people good governance which is accountable, is transparent, is responsive, is equitable and inclusive, is effective and efficient, is participatory and that which promotes peace, harmony and universal brotherhood and managing growth and development without compromising the integrity of the earth’s ecosystem to serve the interest of the present generation and the many more generations to come.