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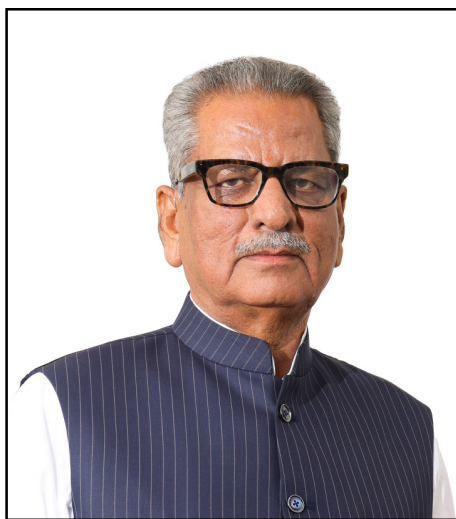
Gangtok (Thursday) August 15, 2024

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Independence Day Messages of Governor and Chief Minister of Sikkim

Let us remain united in our shared vision of Viksit Bharat and Viksit Sikkim. Together, we can turn our aspirations into reality and continue to build a state of which we can all be immensely proud

- Governor



Om Prakash Mathur
Governor of Sikkim

My dear fellow citizens,

On this momentous occasion of the 78th Independence Day, I extend my warmest greetings to each and every one of you. Today, we come together to celebrate the spirit of freedom and the enduring values that define our great nation. This day serves as a powerful reminder of the sacrifices made by countless individuals who fought valiantly for our independence and shaped the course of our country's future.

Today, we reflect on the years of governance, acknowledging the significant changes and challenges we have faced. Through perseverance and unity, Sikkim has navigated unprecedented trials and continued to advance towards the path of progress and development.

We particularly remember a pivotal moment in our history—the merging of Sikkim with India. This historic event, which occurred 50 years ago, marked the beginning of a new era of growth and opportunity for our state. It symbolises not only our integration into the Indian Union but also our shared vision for a prosperous and unified future. As we honor the spirit of independence and unity today, let us reaffirm our commitment to the values that guided our merger and continue to inspire our journey forward.

Despite numerous challenges, Sikkim has made significant strides. Our progress, particularly in health, education, social welfare, and infrastructure development, stands as a testament to our resilience and commitment to building a better future.

Sikkim today is a beacon of progress, driven by the principles of democracy, inclusivity, and sustainable development. Our performance in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Multidimensional Poverty Index underscores our dedication towards eradicating poverty, promoting innovation,

fostering sustainable communities, and combating climate change.

According to the latest India Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) Report by NITI Aayog, Sikkim is recognised for having one of the lowest rates of multidimensional poverty in the country. Additionally, our significant improvement in SDG scores reflects our ongoing efforts to reduce inequalities, enhance safety and inclusivity, and ensure access to clean water and sanitation.

Our achievements in environmental sustainability are also noteworthy. The Mero Rukh Mero Santati initiative has earned global recognition at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP 28 in Dubai. To date, we have successfully planted over 300,000 trees through this initiative.

Sikkim has attained a 100% compliance rate with environmental standards for industries, showcasing our commitment to sustainable industrial practices and environmental protection.

In economic development, Sikkim's manufacturing sector contributes significantly, with the highest value added in the country. Our progress in nutrition and health is equally remarkable, with Sikkim leading the nation in reducing child stunting rates.

Our recognition in the Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS) survey, combined with advancements in financial inclusion and rural development, reflects the hard work and dedication of our people. Our Credit-to-GSDP ratio has seen remarkable growth, and our financial inclusion efforts have achieved full banking coverage across all blocks, with impressive digital enablement in our districts.

As we celebrate this Independence Day, let us take pride in our achievements and renew our commitment to building a prosperous and inclusive future for all.

My dear citizens,

Our achievements have been driven by several key initiatives launched by my government since 2019, which have brought transformative progress to our state:

1. Sikkim Aama Sahyog Yojana: This programme provides ₹20,000 to non-working, unwed, widowed, divorced, or separated mothers aged 18 to 59. It underscores our commitment to gender equality and maternal welfare.

2. Bahini Yojana: This initiative supports girls' welfare by providing free sanitary napkins in government schools and colleges.

3. Mobile Village Clinics: These

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My government will undertake a year-long celebration featuring a diverse array of activities under the theme "Sunaulo Sikkim, Samridha Sikkim-Samarth Sikkim"

- Chief Minister

On this 78th Independence Day, I extend my warmest greetings to the people of Sikkim and to all citizens of our nation. Today, we celebrate our cherished freedom and honor the unwavering spirit of those who fought tirelessly for our liberty. Their sacrifices continue to inspire us as we work towards a more inclusive and prosperous future.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the people of Sikkim for their overwhelming support in the recent General Elections. This April, we conducted elections for the 32 Assembly Constituencies of the Sikkim Legislative Assembly and a single Lok Sabha seat. I am pleased to report that these elections were held smoothly and peacefully, with no major disturbances. Among the 466,643 registered voters, including 2,503 service voters, we achieved a record turnout of 83.43%, the highest in the country. A total of 389,203 voters participated, either at polling stations or through postal ballots, reflecting the strength of our democratic engagement.

For the first time, we introduced home voting for persons with disabilities and senior citizens aged 85 and above, allowing them to vote conveniently from their homes. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the Election Commission of India, the Chief Secretary, and the Director General of Police for their effective management of the electoral process. Special recognition is due to the Chief Electoral Officer of Sikkim and his team for their meticulous planning and execution, which ensured the smooth and peaceful conduct of the elections. I also commend the District Collectors, District Election Officers, Superintendents of Police, and their teams for their dedication to maintaining a peaceful electoral environment.

The successful conduct of the General Elections 2024 is a testament to the efficiency and dedication of the Sikkim administration. This accomplishment is a result of the collective efforts of political parties, candidates, and, most importantly, the engaged and proactive voters of Sikkim. Your participation and trust in the democratic process are deeply appreciated.

My fellow citizens,

I would like to take this opportunity to address some important issues we have faced as a state. One of the most significant and ongoing challenges is the extensive damage caused by the catastrophic flood from the bursting of Lhonak Lake.

The outburst of South Lhonak Lake on October 4th, 2023, led to massive flooding and the destruction of Sikkim's largest dam, the Chungthang Dam. The Teesta III Hydro Power Project, built at a cost of ₹13,965 crore



Prem Singh Tamang
Chief Minister of Sikkim

with a generating capacity of 1,200 MW, has been rendered inoperative. This project was a major source of revenue, with the State Government holding a 60% stake in it. The total estimated loss from this disaster exceeds ₹25,000 crore, nearly 60% of the state's GSDP for 2022-23. The power sector has been severely impacted, with nearly ₹14,000 crore worth of assets becoming non-performing and the loss of revenue from the Teesta III Hydro Power Project. Additionally, Sikkim was entitled to free power from this project, leading to an annual revenue loss of ₹300-400 crore.

Following the catastrophe, the Government of India quickly released ₹245 crore from the National Disaster Response Fund for immediate relief and restoration, which has been immensely helpful. A Post Disaster Needs Assessment, guided by the NDMA and involving experts from various sectors, has determined that ₹3,673 crore is needed for full recovery and reconstruction. The detailed report from this assessment has been submitted to the Government of India, and we are now awaiting its approval.

Additionally, the Hon'ble Union Finance Minister has announced the Assistance for Flood Management and Related Activities during the recent budget session for Financial Year (FY) 2024-25. This assistance will be helpful until the support under PDNA is provided.

My fellow citizens,

I want to assure you that our greatest strength as Sikkimese lies in our resilience and unity. The challenges brought by this devastation will not deter us. We are committed to rebuilding our future, piece by piece, and rising to new heights, reflecting the indomitable spirit and immense potential of our remarkable state.

The recovery process has already

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Let us...

clinics bring healthcare services to remote areas, improving accessibility.

4. Mukhya Mantri Atma Nirbhar Yojna: This scheme promotes self-reliance and entrepreneurship among Sikkim's residents.

5. Mukhya Mantri Krishi Atma Nirbhar Yojna: Provides financial rewards for organic farming of 19 local crops, leading to a significant increase in crop production.

6. Milk Production Incentive: Offers ₹8 per liter to registered dairy farmers, one of the highest incentives in the country, boosting the dairy sector.

7. Pig Production Incentive: Supports pig farming with targeted incentives, increasing local production and improving farmer incomes.

These noteworthy initiatives reflect our ongoing commitment to enhancing the well-being and prosperity of Sikkim.

Sikkim has also made remarkable progress in health indicators. Institutional births have reached 94.7%, and full immunization stands at 97.9%, both exceeding national averages. Furthermore, the Infant Mortality Rate in Sikkim is just 5 per 1,000 live births (SRS-2020), which is significantly better than the national average.

A significant achievement in the health sector is the establishment of the Neurosurgery Department at the New STNM Hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic. Previously, patients with neurological conditions had to seek treatment outside the state, creating considerable difficulties. Since its inception, the department has treated over 2,000 patients and conducted more than 5,000 outpatient consultations. It has performed complex procedures, including transnasal brain tumor surgery and intracranial aneurysm surgery. In 2023, the department also successfully carried out an endovascular procedure, showcasing its advanced medical capabilities.

My Government has significantly upgraded the health infrastructure across all districts, enhancing healthcare access for our citizens. For example, a new hospital is under construction in Namchi District, which will increase the bed capacity from the existing 300 beds to 500 beds and will house all modern facilities, providing better healthcare services.

The Mukhya Mantri Swasthya Suvridha Yojana and Chief Minister's Medical Assistance Scheme have provided critical financial support, ensuring healthcare access for various segments of our population, including those not covered by other health schemes. More than 7,717 patients have benefitted so far through the Mukhya Mantri Swasthya Suvridha Yojana.

The Mobile Village Clinic programme has brought healthcare services directly to remote communities, conducting over 1,305 camps, benefiting 40,451

patients, and performing 15,863 medical tests. These clinics provide a comprehensive range of health services, addressing communicable and non-communicable diseases, as well as maternal and child health.

While these achievements are commendable, we face challenges. The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has declined to 1.1, well below the replacement level of 2.1, posing potential demographic concerns. We also need to improve early initiation of breastfeeding within one hour of delivery, exclusive breastfeeding for six months, and address the dual burden of over-nutrition and under-nutrition. Out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure in Sikkim is higher than the national average, and late marriages and related health issues, including low fertility rates and increasing C-section rates, are areas of concern.

Concerted efforts are being made to address these challenges and enhance the health sector, which remains a top priority for my Government. We are committed to ensuring comprehensive healthcare for all our citizens.

My dear citizens,

I am pleased to highlight key measures taken by my Government to build upon the success we have achieved in agriculture and the allied sectors. One of the most impactful initiatives is the Mukhya Mantri Pashudhan Samridhi Yojana (MMPSY), launched in 2020-21. This innovative programme has been instrumental in boosting local milk and pork production through two major Production Linked Incentive Schemes: the Milk Production Incentive Scheme and the Pig Production Incentive Scheme.

Under the Milk Production Incentive Scheme, farmers registered with the state's Milk Unions receive an incentive of ₹8 per liter, one of the highest in the country. As a result, overall milk production from both organised and unorganised sectors increased by 42% between 2018-19 and 2022-23. Daily milk production rose from 1,66,712.3 liters to 2,37,068.5 liters, and the Sikkim Milk Union Cooperative Union's daily milk collection grew by 33.86%. The Milk Production Incentive Scheme now disburses over ₹1 crore monthly to dairy farmers, with the total incentive amounting to ₹56,55,37,640 for the 2023-24 period.

The Pig Production Incentive Scheme offers financial support ranging from ₹15,000 to ₹50,000 per piggery farmer or household. This scheme has been highly successful, disbursing ₹6 crore to 4,542 piggery farmers, and has resulted in a remarkable increase in pork production from 800 MT in 2020-21 to 1580 MT in 2022-23.

The Mukhya Mantri Krishi Atma Nirbhar Yojna further supports local farmers by offering financial rewards for organic production of 19 locally grown crops. Since its inception, ₹25,67,53,765 has been distributed to 35,264 farmers, promoting sustainable farming practices and agricultural growth.

Under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojna (PMKSY)

Per Drop More Crop (PDMC) programme, my government has covered 13,229.60 hectares, benefiting 32,072 farmers.

These comprehensive measures demonstrate our commitment to enhancing productivity and sustainability in agriculture and allied sectors, marking significant progress in our journey toward innovative and sustainable agricultural practices in the post-merger era.

My dear citizens,

Sikkim has embarked on a transformative journey to become a premier tourism destination in India, driven by a series of strategic initiatives and investments. Our state's achievements in tourism have been widely recognized, including a top ranking in implementing the Swadesh Darshan Scheme, as acknowledged by the Ministry of Tourism in March 2020. Additionally, Sikkim earned the accolade of being the Most Proactive State under the Regional Connectivity Scheme from the Ministry of Civil Aviation in April 2022.

In 2022-23, Sikkim welcomed nearly 2 million tourists, three times our population, marking a significant increase from about 0.7 million in 2015.

Our Government has heavily invested in developing adventure tourism, with notable projects such as the establishment of paragliding and rock climbing facilities at Tarey Bhir in Namchi District and the enhancement of the renowned Dzongri-Goechala trekking trails. Infrastructure improvements are also a key focus, including facilities for the Kailash Manasarovar Yatra, the remodeling of the Burtuk Helipad, and the creation of new walkways, yak trails, and viewpoints at Tsomgo Lake.

We have also launched several theme-based projects to further enhance our tourism offerings. These include the development of pilgrimage sites such as Mangarjung in Soreng District and the Eco-Tourism Pilgrimage site at Dodak, as well as cultural projects like the Rabindranath Tagore Park in Rinchenpong. The Mega Homestay Scheme has been introduced to promote rural tourism by constructing 1,000 homestays, aiming to boost local tourism and create job opportunities.

A standout addition to Sikkim's tourism infrastructure is the Bhaleydhunga Ropeway, which opened in February 2023. Stretching 3.5 kilometers and ascending from 1,800 meters to 3,500 meters above sea level, this state-of-the-art attraction is set to draw significant interest, with plans for a Sky Walk to further enhance the visitor experience.

Another major development is the completion of a passenger ropeway from Pelling Helipad to Sangacholing Monastery hilltop in Gyalshing District. This eco-friendly ropeway enhances connectivity to popular tourist sites like Chenrenzig, Skywalk, and Sangacholing Monastery, and offers stunning views of the Khangchendzonga mountain range.

These comprehensive efforts reflect our commitment to leveraging our State's natural

beauty and cultural heritage to attract both domestic and international tourists, solidifying its status as a top tourism destination.

My dear citizens,

In our unwavering commitment to ensuring that every individual enjoys a dignified life with secure and affordable housing, my Government has launched several impactful initiatives in housing and urban development.

One of our key programmes is the Sikkim Urban Garib Awas Yojana (SUGAY), an innovative state-sponsored urban housing scheme that aligns with critical Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through SUGAY, we are actively constructing 260 social housing flats, each with an area of 688 square feet, and 502 individual houses, each spanning 678.50 square feet, across all seven Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in Sikkim. This initiative aims to provide quality housing solutions for our urban population.

Additionally, we are developing a three-story structure at the Social Housing Complex in Gangtok under the 'Shelter for Houseless Households' programme. This facility will feature separate dormitories for men and women, accommodating up to 40 individuals. It will also include a kitchen, dining area, office, and caretaker's quarters, ensuring dignified accommodation for those in need.

Under the Sikkim Garib Awas Yojana, we have successfully completed and furnished 3,050 houses, equipping them with essential amenities such as furniture and televisions to ensure a comfortable living environment for our rural populace.

Furthermore, significant progress has been made under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. Out of 1,409 sanctioned houses, 1,171 have been completed, providing secure homes to deserving beneficiaries.

My dear citizens,

We understand that improving rural road connectivity is crucial for rural development. Through the **Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)**, which focuses on constructing all-weather roads with essential culverts and cross-drainage structures to ensure year-round access to previously unconnected rural habitations, we have successfully linked remote and inaccessible areas. These roads have also boosted village tourism, including homestays and village resorts, and facilitated the transportation of agricultural produce to markets, opening up new business opportunities for the rural population. Enhanced road connectivity has also provided easy access to essential services such as schools, hospitals, rural markets, tourist spots, and government offices, thereby improving the living standards of rural communities.

In the past five years, under PMGSY, we have constructed 183 roads totaling 749.34 kilometers and 51 long-span bridges. Additionally, 31 long-span bridges sanctioned in 2021 and 2022 for remaining habitations are mostly

completed. We have spent ₹910.92 crore on these projects. Recognizing the importance of the scheme, the State Government has consistently provided the necessary State Share to secure the Central Share. Despite the scheme not covering land compensation, the Sikkim Government has compensated landowners for land, damaged houses, and standing properties to ensure fair treatment.

With Phase I and Phase II of PMGSY nearing completion, Sikkim has secured approval for **PMGSY Phase III**, which involves upgrading **45 roads** spanning **285.90 kilometers** at a cost of **₹249.51 crore**.

Additionally, under the **Vibrant Village Programme**, the Government of India has sanctioned roads spanning 18.73 kilometers and eight long-span bridges at a cost of ₹96.33 crore for Mangan District to connect villages near the international border. While PMGSY Phases I and II have covered all rural habitations with populations over 250, our government is now preparing a proposal for **PMGSY Phase IV** to provide new connectivity to smaller habitations and upgrade existing roads.

Upon completion of the ongoing and proposed works, every rural habitation in Sikkim will be connected with all-weather roads, promoting economic growth, health, education, and sustainability in the state's rural areas.

My dear citizens,

Our commitment to providing safe drinking water and proper sanitation goes beyond merely increasing the quantity of water supply; it is about ensuring the highest quality of water for all.

Through the effective implementation of the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) and the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), along with the strategic use of our state's resources, we have made significant strides. According to the Niti Aayog SDG Progress Report of July 2024, the availability of piped water supply in Sikkim has surged to 88.6% of households, up from 37.4% in 2021-22. All rural households now have access to adequate and improved water sources, and our efforts are now focused on achieving 100% coverage in urban areas as well.

In terms of physical achievements, out of 1,31,880 households, 1,18,035 now have functional household tap connections, reflecting an 89.50% success rate towards our target. The remaining 10.5% are expected to be completed within the Financial Year 2024-25. Additionally, we have designated one block as a Har Ghar Jal Block, 42 Gram Panchayats as Har Ghar Jal Panchayats, 111 villages as Har Ghar Jal Villages, and 1,652 habitations as Har Ghar Jal Habitations.

Despite these advances, we continue to tackle key issues related to access and quality. This involves identifying reliable water sources, ensuring thorough

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Let us...

quality testing, proper storage, and effective household connectivity. Our commitment to sustainability requires ongoing development and assessment of both surface and underground reserves, as well as robust waste management practices to ensure that post-treatment water is utilized effectively.

Through the combined efforts of the Jal Jeevan Mission, AMRUT, and our own state resources, we remain dedicated to ensuring that every household, both rural and urban, has access to safe, piped drinking water.

My fellow citizens,

Rural sanitation is a top priority for our Government. Thanks to our persistent efforts, Sikkim has been recognised as the first ODF Plus Model State. This prestigious designation signifies that our state has established comprehensive facilities and arrangements for the safe and scientific management of solid and liquid waste, effective IEC and awareness signage, minimal stagnant water, and a visually clean environment.

Under the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen), my Government has achieved substantial progress. We have constructed 12,502 Individual Household Latrines (IHHL) and 659 Community Sanitary Complexes (CSC). Additionally, we have set up 4 Plastic Waste Management Units (PWMU), with 19 more in progress, and established 33 Resource Recovery Centres (RRC). Other significant accomplishments include the creation of 6,001 individual soak pits for grey water, 310 community soak pits, 9,013 individual compost pits, 368 community compost pits, retrofitting of 1,019 single pits to twin pits, and retrofitting of 383 septic tanks with soak pits. We have also deployed 47 resource recovery vehicles, 355 segregation sheds, and 268 bins at community locations.

Furthermore, we have introduced 07 Mobile Treatment Units (MTU) under the Swachh Bharat Kosh to scientifically treat faecal sludge from septic tanks, thereby enhancing the state's faecal sludge treatment capacity. We are also establishing Faecal Sludge Treatment Plants (FSTP) and co-treatment facilities in existing STPs to manage faecal sludge in peri-urban areas and villages in an environmentally friendly manner, adhering to the guidelines of the National Green Tribunal and CPCB.

To support solid waste management, we have provided 14 Resource Recovery Vehicles to Gram Panchayats and Self-Help Groups (SHGs). Sanitation is crucial for the welfare and well-being of our people, and my Government remains committed to sustaining and advancing the achievements made in this vital area.

My dear citizens,

Environmental conservation remains a cornerstone of our government's agenda, reflecting our commitment to preserving

natural heritage and promoting sustainable practices. Since 2019, we have implemented several innovative policies and initiatives aimed at fostering a greener, more sustainable future.

Our annual Sikkim Paryavaran Parva, celebrated from July 1-14 with the theme "Leave a Green Legacy," serves as a significant platform for promoting the human-nature connection. This fortnightly event includes workshops on endangered species, water conservation, and zero waste lifestyles, alongside clean-up drives, green reels competitions, and various activities. These events engage the public, strengthen the bond between people and nature, and inspire collective responsibility toward environmental stewardship.

The Mero Rukh Mero Santati initiative encourages planting 108 trees to commemorate each child's birth. To date, 6,476 children have been registered in this programme, enhancing the state's green cover while celebrating new life.

Under the Sikkim Shishu Samridhi Yojana, we open a fixed deposit of ₹10,800 in the name of each child, redeemable only when the child turns 18. This initiative not only supports the financial security of children but also fosters long-term environmental awareness.

The Mero Bato Mero Bot campaign, a collaborative effort between Forest and Environment Department and Roads and Bridges Department, focuses on greening roadways. It promotes planting and maintaining trees along roadsides, boosting green cover, and raising environmental awareness through active community participation.

Through the My Child from the Wild programme, individuals or groups can adopt an animal through an agreement with Park Management. Sponsors support conservation efforts and benefit from free park entry and access to zoo programmes, thereby fostering public participation in wildlife conservation.

On June 5, 2022, the Blue Duke (Bassaronadurga) was declared the State Butterfly of Sikkim. This designation, achieved through expert input and public voting, underscores our commitment to celebrating and protecting our unique biodiversity.

The 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign, launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, is actively followed in Sikkim. This campaign, a gesture of respect for mothers and a commitment to sustainability, is successfully implemented across the state.

My dear citizens,

Ease of living represents the culmination of our developmental efforts, all designed to elevate your quality of life and foster optimism for the future. Sikkim excels in numerous critical civic facilities that underpin ease of living. According to the 78th NSSO survey, we stand out in several key areas:

- **Water Access:** Nearly 75% of rural and 87% of urban facilities have access to water for their exclusive use, surpassing the national averages of 49% and 65%, respectively.
- **Sanitation:** Sikkim is proud

to be the first state to achieve open defecation-free status. Over 94% of families have access to handwashing facilities with soap or detergent, compared to the all-India average of 82%.

- **Energy:** Almost 94% of facilities use LPG as their main cooking medium, significantly higher than the all-India average of 47%. About half of the families also utilize clean energy for cooking, heating, and lighting.

- **Bank Access:** More than 90% of individuals have bank accounts, which facilitates direct benefit transfers and promotes financial literacy.

- **Indebtedness:** Sikkim boasts a relatively low indebtedness rate, with only 7.7% of individuals over the age of 18 in debt, much lower than the national average.

Our vision is closely aligned with the national agenda of Viksit Bharat-2047, which aims to propel India into the ranks of developed nations by 2047, marking the 100th year of independence. This vision is underpinned by four key pillars: economic growth, environmental sustainability, social progress, and good governance.

In support of this vision, our government has identified five pivotal areas for economic acceleration. We are committed to enhancing youth employability through targeted skill development programmes and employment initiatives. Developing Sikkim as a healthcare and wellness hub is a priority, leveraging our growing pharmaceutical industry to establish world-class infrastructure. We are investing in innovative agricultural practices and food processing to boost productivity and economic sustainability. Additionally, promoting tourism and supporting micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) will diversify our economy and create new growth opportunities. Improving civic amenities and social infrastructure, including roads, water supply, and public services, remains a key focus to elevate the quality of life for all residents.

Moving forward, our government is committed to fostering balanced development by focusing on these critical sectors: tourism, roads, water, electricity, education, forests, social security, and overall development.

My dear citizens,

Our commitment to empowering our people, nurturing our youth, and safeguarding our natural resources remains unwavering. As we work towards a vision of "Sunaulo Sikkim, Samridha Sikkim, Samarth Sikkim," we must confront the alarming rates of substance abuse in our state. Recent research by AIIMS has unveiled troubling statistics: 15.6% of our population uses sedatives, 10.94% uses cannabis, 18.74% abuses opioids, and 4.58% uses inhalants. These figures underscore the urgent need for decisive action.

In response, we have launched the Nasha Mukh Sikkim campaign, a comprehensive strategy designed to tackle this crisis head-on. This initiative includes the formation of the State

Core Committee, the Sahyogi Programme, Anti-Drug Cells, a Parent Awareness Programme, a Special Task Force, Rehabilitation Centers, Post-Rehabilitation Counseling, Primary Health Centers, and Community Vigilance Groups. Each of these components plays a critical role in raising awareness and implementing practical measures to address substance abuse.

Overcoming this challenge requires a collective effort from individuals, families, the State Government, and society as a whole. I urge every community member, especially mothers, to actively participate and report any suspicious activities. Your vigilance is essential in creating a safer and healthier environment.

Let us unite under the Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan and commit ourselves to a drug-free Sikkim. Together, we can address this issue and build a brighter future for our state and our youth. I pledge to support this cause with all the resources at my disposal.

As we navigate current challenges and embrace future opportunities, let us remain united in our shared vision of Viksit Bharat and Viksit Sikkim. Together, we can

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My government...

been initiated, and the Goskhan Dara Bridge, popularly known as Indreni Bridge, is a testament to our efforts. The original double-lane steel bridge at this location, constructed in 2012, was washed away during the flash flood of October 3-4, 2023, along the Teesta River Basin in Sikkim. This bridge was a critical connection to Adarsh Gaon, which is only 200 meters away from Singtam on the other bank of the river and home to a significant urban populace. The loss of this bridge disrupted connectivity from Singtam to other places in the Namchi District, significantly increasing travel time and hampering state operations. However, a bailey suspension bridge has been constructed and is now operational, restoring this vital link.

Similarly, the bridge over the Teesta River at Sirwani, an existing double-lane prestressed concrete bridge known as the L. D. Kazi Bridge was also washed away during the same flash flood. This bridge was a crucial link between the East and South-West Districts. Its destruction brought inter-district vehicular movement to a standstill, causing increased travel time and inconvenience to the public. Currently, a temporary arrangement atop the upcoming dam at Sirwani is being utilised for vehicular movement. The preparation of a detailed project report for the construction of a new double-lane bridge is underway.

These recovery efforts reflect our government's commitment to restoring essential infrastructure and minimising disruptions to the lives of our citizens.

Our government has also allocated significant resources for cash relief to affected families and will begin essential recovery and reconstruction activities this

turn our aspirations into reality and continue to build a state of which we can all be immensely proud.

As I conclude, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the State Meritorious Award winners. Your hard work and dedication exemplify the values of excellence and perseverance. Your achievements are not only a testament to your personal commitment but also play a crucial role in the process of nation-building. You inspire us all and contribute significantly to the progress and development of our state and country.

As we gather today to honour the sacrifices of those who paved the way for our independence, let us renew our commitment to building a prosperous and inclusive future for all. Together, with unwavering resolve and shared purpose, we will continue to uphold the values of freedom, equality, and justice, driving our nation towards even greater heights. May this day inspire us to work together, embrace our diversity, and contribute to the enduring progress of our great nation.

Happy Independence Day!

JAI HIND! JAI SIKKIM!

financial year. Additionally, we will implement the **Punar Awaz Yojana** to support families displaced by the flood, ensuring they have the means to rebuild their homes and their lives.

I am delighted to share some of our most celebrated and nationally recognised achievements from recent years of governance:

- * **Mero Rukh Mero Santati Initiative:** This programme, aimed at strengthening the bond between parents, children, and nature by planting 108 trees for every newborn in Sikkim, has received international acclaim, including recognition at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP 28 in Dubai. To date, we have successfully planted more than 300,000 trees through this initiative.

- * **NITI Aayog Report:** Sikkim has emerged as a top performer in the latest NITI Aayog Sustainable Development Goals assessment, underscoring our steadfast commitment to sustainable development and equitable growth. The report highlights several key areas of progress:

- * Sikkim has been honoured as the 4th Best State in Poverty Alleviation, following Kerala, Goa, and Tamil Nadu. Today, only 2.6% of our population, approximately 18,200 out of an estimated 7 lakh people, lives below the poverty line, significantly lower than the national average of 11%.

- * Sikkim boasts the 7th highest gross enrolment ratio in the country, standing at 38.6%, well above the national average of 28.4%.

- * Sikkim ranks as the 4th most digitised State or Union Territory (after Delhi, Chandigarh, and Mizoram) among states with a population of less than 1 crore, according to the State of India's Digital Economy 2024 report. This reflects our performance in

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My government...

Connect, Harness, Innovate, Protect, and Sustain (CHIPS).

* Under SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), there has been a significant drop in crime rates related to women and within communities. Additionally, under SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), Sikkim has achieved an impressive score of 96%, ensuring that all residents have access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation facilities.

* Sikkim has the highest court density in India, with 6 courts per lakh population, ensuring timely justice and upholding the rule of law.

* In terms of environmental conservation, Sikkim has a 100% compliance rate with environmental standards for industries, demonstrating our dedication to sustainable industrial practices and environmental protection.

* The value added by the manufacturing sector in Sikkim stands at 35.7%, the highest in the country, reflecting the strength of our industrial base and the effectiveness of our policies in fostering industrial growth and innovation.

* According to NFHS-5 (2019-2021), Sikkim has the lowest percentage of stunted children under 5 at 22.3%, below the national target of 23.7% set by WHO's Global Nutrition Targets Tracking Tool, showcasing our success in combating malnutrition and promoting child health.

These achievements reflect our collective efforts and dedication towards a brighter and more prosperous future for Sikkim.

Let me take this opportunity to highlight some of our government's major achievements, plans, and the challenges we aim to overcome in the sectors we deem of utmost importance for the growth of our state.

My fellow citizens,

Tourism is a vital part of our state, providing livelihoods for nearly 18% of our population and ranking second only to agriculture in its impact. In 2022-23, Sikkim welcomed almost 2 million tourists, a significant increase from about 0.7 million in 2015. This growth highlights the sector's importance and the need for a strategic approach to sustain and enhance it.

Recognising tourism's role in economic growth and potential negative impacts, our government is committed to promoting sustainable tourism across various segments, including leisure, ecotourism, adventure, cultural and religious tourism, village homestays, health and wellness tourism, and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions).

To boost convention tourism, we are constructing a state-of-the-art Convention Centre in Namli, Gangtok, at a cost of ₹900 crores. This facility, with a capacity of 2,000 people, will feature versatile conference halls, meeting rooms, guest houses, and a heated swimming pool, positioning Sikkim as a premier

wedding destination.

Our vision is to make Sikkim a year-round destination for nature, adventure, and cultural tourism, benefiting local communities and enhancing social and economic development. We aim to attract high-value, long-stay tourists while ensuring exceptional hospitality.

To address challenges such as privatised profits, low per capita spending, short stays, seasonality, and limited tourism sources, we are developing a comprehensive policy that includes:

* Promoting high-value tourism and developing exclusive attractions.

* Enhancing home stays and community-managed tourism with necessary funding.

* Creating job opportunities by training guides, hotel staff, and security personnel.

* Improving infrastructure such as roads, communication, water, electricity, and sanitation.

* Preserving and enhancing Sikkim's natural beauty.

Our government is developing infrastructure projects aimed at enhancing the natural beauty of our state and attracting more tourists. These initiatives are designed to boost tourism while preserving and highlighting Sikkim's unique natural allure. Notable projects include:

* The eco-friendly ropeway from Dhapper to Bhaleydhunga, with an investment of ₹209.57 crores, set to begin commercial operations soon.

* The passenger ropeway from Pelling Helipad to Sangacholing Monastery, costing ₹166.72 crores, which is now ready for commercial use.

* A skywalk at Bhaleydhunga in Namchi District, with a ₹396.14 crore investment, offering a breathtaking 360-degree view of the landscape.

* The transformation of Singshore Bridge into a glass skywalk bridge in Gyalshing District, with an investment of ₹87.51 crores.

We are also working with the Government of India to reopen Sikkim as an alternate route for the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and to build a Multimodal Corridor with an integrated check post between Sikkim and Eastern Nepal at Chewabhanjyang. This will boost cultural, economic, social, and ecological exchanges.

My fellow citizens,

Our Government is well aware that in order to strengthen our tourism sector, it is crucial that our road network is well-connected. Although we have made significant improvements, further development is necessary to support tourism and enhance the travel experience.

For this, we are focusing on key road projects that lead to key tourists' destinations such as Upgrading the Ravangla-Damthang Road, upgrading the Indira Bypass Road, resurfacing and improving the Rumtek-Rey-Ranka-Sichey Road, upgrading the Nayabazar-Legship Road, and upgrading State Highway 19 and constructing an 80-meter Steel Composite Bridge over Gom Khola.

These upgrades will boost

tourism in Pelling, Kaluk, Rinchenpong, Hilley, Barsey, and Ravangla, and improve the Naya Bazar - Mangalbaria - Rinchenpong-Kaluk-Dentam-Chewabhanjyang road.

We are also proposing the construction of an alternate highway from Melli to Singtam, with an investment of ₹2502.74 crore, including ₹50 crore for land acquisition. This road will shorten the distance between Melli and Singtam and offer a climate-resilient route. Additionally, we have requested the Government of India to extend this road up to Sevoke.

To attract high-value tourists, we have launched a heliport at Burtuk for a 26-seater helicopter service between Bagdogra and Gangtok. We will also develop the Indira Bypass from Burtuk to Gangtok and restore the perennial subsidence zone at Manbir Colony.

To address climate change impacts like landslides and flooding, we are using climate-resilient technologies, such as thin white topping roads and a two-lane traffic tunnel at Chirbireytar, Jorethang. We plan to restore the Sisney subsidence zone with Reinforced Earth wall technology.

We are currently pursuing investments from Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), with funding from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) nearing completion with the goal of enhancing connectivity, supporting tourism, and driving overall development for a prosperous future for all.

My fellow citizens,

Another key focus of our government as we enter our second term is ensuring both safe drinking water and proper sanitation. Our vision extends beyond merely increasing the quantity of water supply to ensuring its quality.

We have made significant progress through the successful implementation of the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) and the Atal Mission for Urban Rejuvenation and Transformation (AMRUT), along with leveraging our state's resources. According to the recent NITI Aayog SDG Progress Report of July 2024, piped water now reaches 88.6% of households in Sikkim, a substantial increase from 37.4% in 2021-22. We have achieved full coverage in rural areas and are now focused on reaching 100% coverage in urban areas.

Out of 131,880 households, 118,035 have functional tap connections, representing 89.5% of our target. We aim to cover the remaining 10.5% by the end of the Financial Year 2024-25.

We have also achieved several milestones: one block has been declared a Har Ghar Jal Block, 42 Gram Panchayats have been recognised as Har Ghar Jal Panchayats, 111 villages are now Har Ghar Jal Villages, and 1,652 habitations have been designated as Har Ghar Jal Habitations.

Despite these advancements, we are continually addressing key issues related to water access and quality. These include identifying reliable water sources, ensuring regular quality testing and proper storage,

establishing reliable connections to households, developing and assessing both surface and underground water reserves, and implementing effective waste management to ensure safe water use post-treatment.

My fellow citizens,

Today, Sikkim stands as a leader in India's health sector, reflecting our unwavering commitment to advancing healthcare through significant improvements in infrastructure, capacity building, and service delivery. These efforts have led to remarkable progress across various health indicators.

According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), our achievements are impressive:

* Birth registration for children under five years is at 96.5% in Sikkim, compared to the national average of 89.1%.

* Death registration in the last three years is 75.5% in Sikkim, surpassing the national figure of 70.8%.

* The neonatal mortality rate in Sikkim is 5 per 1,000 live births, significantly lower than the national rate of 24.9.

* The infant mortality rate stands at 5 per 1,000 live births in Sikkim, compared to 28 per 1,000 nationwide.

* The under-five mortality rate is 11.2 per 1,000 live births in Sikkim, while the national rate is 41.9.

* 70.0% of mothers in Sikkim had an antenatal check-up in the first trimester, higher than the national average of 63.7%.

* Institutional births in Sikkim are 94.7%, compared to 88.6% nationally.

* Births attended by skilled health personnel are 96.5% in Sikkim, compared to 89.4% nationwide.

* 86.3% of women aged 15-24 in Sikkim use hygienic methods of protection during menstruation, surpassing the national figure of 77.3%.

* 80.6% of children aged 12-23 months are fully vaccinated in Sikkim, compared to 76.4% nationally.

* 87.5% of children aged 9-35 months received a Vitamin A dose in the last six months, compared to 71.2% nationwide.

* Most vaccinations for children aged 12-23 months in Sikkim were administered in public health facilities, compared to 94.5% nationally.

Our persistent efforts to enhance the quality of healthcare services in the state have led to significant achievements, particularly at the New STNM Hospital, where our super-specialty departments have reached notable milestones:

* In Medical Oncology, we have revolutionised cancer treatment by introducing immunotherapy and radiotherapy, significantly improving patient outcomes.

* Our Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery/Burns Unit excels in managing head and neck cancer surgeries, conducting annual cleft camps with Mission Smile, and effectively treating severe burn cases.

* The Cardiology Department, equipped with a

state-of-the-art Cath-lab Operation Theatre, has successfully performed over 1,900 operations, showcasing our advanced cardiac care capabilities.

* In Gastroenterology, we have pioneered groundbreaking procedures, including Argon Plasma Coagulation for bleeding ulcers, various stenting techniques for cancer treatment, and Endoscopic Ultrasound, enhancing our diagnostic and therapeutic offerings.

* The Cardiothoracic Vascular Surgery Department has achieved remarkable success with procedures such as Endovascular Laser Ablation, Decortication Surgery, Single Lung Ventilation, and the repair of massive diaphragm ruptures.

* Neurosurgery capabilities have been significantly enhanced with advanced spine surgeries, emergency craniotomies, brain tumor operations, neuro-endovascular procedures, and intracranial aneurysm clippings.

* Our Obstetrics & Gynaecology team has successfully carried out complex procedures, including pelvic and para-aortic lymphadenectomies, radical hysterectomies, and cytoreduction surgeries for ovarian cancer.

* The Urology Department has performed approximately 2,000 major surgeries, addressing conditions such as massive bladder stones, complex partial nephrectomies, and rare adrenal gland tumors.

* Head and Neck Surgical Oncology has conducted over 210 surgeries for head and neck malignancies and provided more than 1,500 day-care services, greatly reducing the need for patients to seek costly treatments outside the state.

My fellow citizens,

The establishment of dialysis centres in every district hospital across the state has had a significant impact on the health sector. Recognising Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) as a critical public health issue, we undertook comprehensive studies to address this challenge and ensure that every district has access to essential dialysis services.

Our government has equipped several district hospitals with hemodialysis machines to meet the critical need for dialysis services.

The District Hospital in Gyalshing, equipped with five machines, serves 38 patients and has conducted 3,280 dialysis sessions, with a waiting list of 10 patients.

The District Hospital in Mangan, also with five machines, serves 15 patients and has conducted 1,279 sessions as of June 2024.

The District Hospital in Namchi, with seven machines, supports 51 patients and has facilitated 6,077 sessions, with a waiting list of 15 patients.

The New STNM Hospital is equipped with 28 hemodialysis machines, including one for hepatitis and HIV-positive patients. This facility serves 200 patients and has conducted 18,149

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sessions, with a waiting list of 247 patients as of June 2024.

Additionally, we introduced Peritoneal Dialysis as a pilot project in 2021, currently supporting 41 patients with free consumables.

Across the state, we now have 45 dialysis machines serving 304 patients daily and have conducted 28,785 sessions from April 2023 to June 2024. The total waiting list across these facilities is 272 patients.

We are also in the process of establishing dialysis centres at Jorethang and Soreng PHCs to further enhance access to these critical services.

Our government is also actively developing new district hospitals in Singtam and Soreng, reflecting our dedication to expanding healthcare access across the state. Moreover, we are significantly upgrading the Namchi District Hospital to a 500-bedded facility, fully funded by the state. Set to be completed and inaugurated in 2025, this expansion will coincide with Sikkim's 50th anniversary of statehood. The upgraded facility will serve Namchi and neighbouring districts, easing the patient load at the New STNM Hospital and further strengthening our healthcare system.

We have allocated substantial funds to enhance our healthcare services, focusing on acquiring cutting-edge technology and new hospital equipment. Significant investments are being made to upgrade the Nephrology Ward at the New STNM Hospital, including enhancements to support kidney transplants and meet the growing demand for specialised care.

Our commitment extends to supporting essential health programmes through substantial funding for the Mukhya Mantri Swastha Suvidha Yojana and the Chief Minister's Medical Assistance Fund, providing financial aid to those in need of medical care. We have also established a dedicated maintenance fund for the New STNM Hospital and are robustly supporting the Mobile Village Clinic initiative to strengthen healthcare outreach in rural areas.

To address one of the major concerns we face-Sikkim's declining Total Fertility Rate (TFR)-we launched the Vatsalya Scheme on April 7, 2022. This scheme offers up to ₹3,00,000 per couple for fertility treatments, with ₹1,50,000 available for each attempt. Since its introduction, 779 beneficiaries have received support from this scheme, with a success rate of 13-15%.

My fellow citizens,

In our commitment to transforming the education sector, which we recognise as a cornerstone of Sikkim's future, we have made significant strides.

For the 2022-23 academic year, Sikkim's Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) are impressive: 90.50% for elementary education, 78.96% for secondary education, and 65.11% for senior secondary education. Our Net Enrolment

Ratios stand at 69.92% for elementary and secondary education, and 35.67% for senior secondary. Our transition rates are also noteworthy, with 90.78% moving from primary to upper primary, 98.35% from upper primary to secondary, and 98.35% from secondary to senior secondary.

Looking ahead, our goal is to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy, aiming for a 100% GER by 2030. We are leveraging digital innovations to enhance efficiency and transparency. New initiatives include establishing a Model Residential School in Assam Lingzey to provide quality education to talented yet underprivileged children. This school will serve as a model for implementing the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and will open in the next academic session.

The Chief Minister's Merit Scholarship Scheme (CMMSS) continues to support economically disadvantaged and tribal children, benefiting 1,157 students by 2023. We are expanding this scheme to include additional spots and reservations for children with special needs.

Sikkim is also leading in vocational education by offering vocational trades from Classes IX to XII across all 211 government secondary and senior secondary schools. We are establishing the State School Standards Authority (SSSA) to align with national assessment standards and ensure high-quality education.

Our commitment to innovation includes integrating mindfulness and meditation into schools through the PM SHRI Scheme. In 2023, 242 teachers received training in the Heartfulness Way Curriculum and HELP Programme. Additionally, School Nutrition Gardens are being developed to teach students about organic farming and entrepreneurship.

The Education Management and Monitoring Information System (EMMIS) and the Vidya Samiksha Kendra (VSK) are improving our data collection and decision-making processes.

To inspire our educators, our government organises exposure trips for State Awardees and Commendation Certificate recipients. In 2024, 37 State Awardees will visit Tamil Nadu and Kerala, while one National Awardee Teacher will travel to Singapore, Malaysia, and Japan.

We will also work to ensure government colleges evolve into multi-disciplinary Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) starting from the 2025-26 academic session, offering flexible four-year undergraduate programmes. Under the Rashtriya Uchhatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), we are constructing four new government colleges and supporting the Khangchendzonga State University (KSU) campus at Tarku with PM-USHA funds. We are also establishing NIT Khamdong and providing 50 MBBS seats at Sikkim Manipal University (SMU), fully funded by the State Government, with an additional 30 seats available on a payment basis for Sikkimese students.

My dear citizens,

Since we assumed governance, our steadfast commitment to environmental conservation and preserving Sikkim's natural beauty has been at the forefront of our agenda. Apart from the globally acclaimed Mero Rukh Mero Santati initiative, we have embarked on several innovative projects to ensure a sustainable future. Under the Sikkim Shishu Samridhi Yojana, our government creates a fixed deposit of ₹10,800 for each child, redeemable when they turn 18. This initiative supports the financial security of children while fostering long-term environmental awareness.

The 'Mero Bato Mero Bot' campaign, a collaborative effort between the Forest and Environment Department and the Roads and Bridges Department, focuses on greening our roadways. This campaign aims to plant and maintain trees along roadsides, enhance green cover, and promote environmental awareness through community participation.

Sikkim now celebrates Sikkim Paryavarana Parva annually from July 1-14, themed 'Leave a Green Legacy'. This significant event features workshops on endangered species, water conservation, and zero-waste lifestyles, along with clean-up drives, green reels competitions, and other activities that engage the public and strengthen our connection with nature.

Under the My Child from the Wild programme, individuals or groups can adopt an animal through an agreement with Park Management. Sponsors support conservation efforts and enjoy benefits such as free park entry and access to zoo programmes, fostering public engagement in wildlife conservation.

We have also actively participated in the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister to honour mothers and underscore our commitment to sustainability. I, along with my cabinet members, have proudly taken part in this campaign, which has been successfully implemented in Sikkim.

On June 5, 2022, we designated the Blue Duke (Bassaronadurga) as Sikkim's State Butterfly. This designation, achieved through expert input and public voting, highlights our commitment to celebrating and protecting Sikkim's unique biodiversity.

Through these diverse and impactful initiatives, our government continues to advance environmental stewardship goals and foster a greener, more sustainable future for all.

My dear citizens,

Sikkim is steadfast in its commitment to enhancing social security and empowering our citizens, particularly women and marginalised groups. Our initiatives are designed to foster a supportive and inclusive environment for all.

We have made significant strides in women's representation and empowerment by reserving a minimum of 50% of seats for

women in Panchayat elections, leading to over 53% of these positions being held by women. This achievement underscores our dedication to gender equality and inclusive governance.

Our flagship programme, the **Sikkim Aama Sashaktikaran Yojana (SASY)**, offers crucial support to non-working, unwed, widowed, divorced, or separated mothers. With an annual financial grant of ₹40,000 distributed in two installments, this initiative enables these mothers to invest in their children's education or start small businesses, promoting financial independence. The budget for SASY has been increased from ₹32.00 crores in 2022-23 to ₹65.00 crores in 2023-24, allowing us to extend support to more beneficiaries.

Our **Sikkim Aama Sahyog Yojana** will provide four LPG cylinders to mothers aged 18 to 59, further demonstrating our commitment to gender equality and maternal welfare.

Through the **Bahini Yojana**, we are providing free sanitary napkins in government schools and colleges, addressing critical health and hygiene needs for girls.

To promote economic self-reliance, our Government supports residents through the **Mukhya Mantri Atma Nirbhar Yojna**, which encourages entrepreneurship. The **Mukhya Mantri Krishi Atma Nirbhar Yojna**, launched by our Government, promotes traditional and natural farming by offering financial rewards for locally-grown crops, leading to increased crop production.

The **Milk Production Incentive** provides ₹8 per litter to farmers through the state's Milk Unions, boosting the dairy sector. Similarly, the **Pig Production Incentive** supports pig farming with targeted incentives, enhancing local production and farmer incomes.

Our Government is dedicated to advancing the well-being of our state and fostering a more equitable and prosperous society for all.

Additionally, to support our state's growth and create a secure environment, we have introduced new laws to improve our criminal justice system. Key among these is the **Inter-operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS) 2.0**, designed to modernise and streamline our criminal justice processes. The **Regional Forensic Science Laboratory** has been moved from the Police Administration to the State Home Department in 2023 to enhance our forensic capabilities.

We have also established the **Directorate of Prosecution**, as mandated by the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita. This Directorate will be set up at both the State and District levels to effectively manage and coordinate criminal cases, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our justice system.

Our Government is already working to implement these updates, ensuring our justice system operates more efficiently and fairly.

These initiatives are a testament to our unwavering commitment to the development

and prosperity of Sikkim. Together, let us continue to work towards a brighter, more inclusive future for our state.

My dear citizens,

Our government has also decided to introduce several dedicated boards to address the unique needs and challenges faced by specific groups. These boards include:

1. Farmers Welfare Board
2. Students Welfare Board
3. Retired Employees Welfare Board
4. Labour Welfare Board
5. Sports Development Board
6. Art, Culture, and Heritage Development Board
7. All Sikkim Chalak Welfare Board

This significant step aims to further our goal of creating a well-rounded and developed society. Through these specialised boards, we are committed to providing focused support, resources, and opportunities to enhance the well-being and growth of each group, ensuring that every citizen of Sikkim can thrive and contribute to our collective progress.

My dear citizens,

Our government is confident that these measures will foster comprehensive growth in the State's revenue receipts. We have also secured assistance from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank to accelerate our state's development.

Urbanisation brings many benefits but also poses challenges like overcrowding and deteriorating air and water quality. To address these issues, we need substantial infrastructure transformations in our towns. We have sought financial backing from external agencies to enhance infrastructure in seven towns across Sikkim: Singtam, parts of Gangtok (Tadong and Ranipool wards), Pakyong, Rangpo, Mangan, Gyalshing, and Soreng. The Government of India has granted in-principle approval for securing US\$180 million (approximately ₹1,494 crore) from the ADB for these projects, which require a total estimated investment of US\$225 million (approximately ₹18,600 crore).

This ADB-supported project will enable us to **Strengthen Climate-Resilient and Smart Urban Infrastructure, Improve Urban Mobility and Livability and Enhance State and Municipal Capacity**.

Moreover, in our pursuit to enhance and modernise Sikkim's power sector, we have secured assistance from the ADB. Since the devastating floods of October 2023, which washed away the Teesta III project and its adjoining dam, our power sector has faced significant challenges, transforming Sikkim from a power-surplus state to one requiring additional support.

Recognising the urgent need for a robust and reliable power infrastructure, the ADB has approved a loan of US\$148.5 million (approximately ₹1,220 crore) to strengthen, modernise, and climate-proof our distribution system. This initiative aims to

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improve the reliability, quality, and resilience of electricity supply, supporting Sikkim's Power for All initiative to ensure round-the-clock access to quality electricity for households, industries, businesses, and the public.

Key upgrades under this project will include Strengthening Climate-Resilient Infrastructure, Upgrading Power Substations, Modernising Power Management, adding Public Street Lighting, conducting Electricity Conservation and Safety Programs and Renewable Energy Integration.

Additionally, the ADB will assist in developing a financial sustainability strategy to establish the Sikkim Power Department as a self-sufficient entity, including formulating a power distribution master plan and devising a strategy for gender and social inclusion.

I am also pleased to share an important initiative taken by our government to enhance economic opportunities for women and youth through the Sikkim Integrated Service Provision and Innovation for Reviving Economies (INSPIRES) programme, supported by the World Bank. This transformative project, with a total budget of approximately ₹1,900 crore, including US\$100 million (around ₹830 crore) in loan assistance from the World Bank, will be implemented over five years.

The Sikkim INSPIRES programme is designed to drive economic inclusion and improve employment prospects in non-farm sectors. Our comprehensive approach includes Strengthening State Systems, Boosting Entrepreneurship, Providing Training, and Improving Care and Safety.

Nine key government departments, including the Planning and Development, Commerce and Industries, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Skill Development, Rural Development, Information Technology, Forest and Environment, Women and Child Development, and Health and Family Welfare, are collaborating under a unified Results Framework to drive the programme's success.

The Sikkim INSPIRES programme also features a robust

Mental Health Action Plan, providing psycho-social support and aiming to bridge gaps in mental health services for youth and women.

To address our demographic challenge, given the low Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 1.1, our government has launched several initiatives and formed an Inter-Departmental Working Group to collaborate with leading institutes and organisations.

A key focus of INSPIRES is preparing our women and youth to meet the growing global demand for healthcare professionals. By equipping them with essential skills, we aim to address shortages in regions such as Japan, Europe, Canada, and the USA. Our trainees will have opportunities both abroad and within India's major hospitals.

By 2030, we plan to prepare our trainees for various regions, including Southeast Asia, East Asia, the Middle East, North America, Europe, and the South West Pacific.

With the Sikkim INSPIRES programme, we are setting a new standard in policy advocacy, placing women and youth at the core of our economic and emotional development strategy.

My dear citizens,

State revenue has remained a top priority for our Government. After securing overwhelming support in the recent elections and forming the Government for a second term, our Cabinet's first decision was to direct major revenue-earning departments to conduct a comprehensive review of their revenue sources. This aims to enhance revenue and prevent any potential leakages. We issued directives for timely assessment of revenue receipts and established control mechanisms to achieve revenue targets.

Our Government has implemented several initiatives to boost State revenue receipts:

1. Advanced Check Post Management Systems: State-of-the-art systems at Rangpo, Melli, and other border posts to monitor goods vehicle movements and prevent revenue leakages.

2. Strengthening GST Database: Expanding the GST tax base, especially in the hospitality sector, to ensure comprehensive collection.

3. Encouraging Voluntary Compliance and Enforcement: Promoting voluntary compliance

among taxpayers and establishing an enforcement centre at Bardang.

4. E-Abkari Project: Facilitating online applications, renewals, registrations, and permits through the Excise Department to improve revenue generation.

5. Revising Tariffs and Fees: Updating tariffs, fees, and user charges to enhance revenue receipts.

6. Prepaid Energy Meters: Installing prepaid meters to eliminate revenue leakages due to theft or under-assessment.

7. GPS Tracking for SNT Vehicles: Installing GPS tracking systems in all functional SNT vehicles for accurate supervision charge collection.

8. Volumetric Water Tax System: Shifting to a volumetric system for water tax collection to boost revenue.

9. Online Permit System: Introducing an online permit system for visiting Tsogmo and Nathula to streamline the process for tourists.

These measures will strengthen our state's revenue and support sustainable growth.

My dear citizens,

As we look forward, I am delighted to announce that next year marks the 50th anniversary of our beloved state's statehood. On May 16, 1975, Sikkim proudly became the 22nd state of India, unlocking numerous opportunities and fulfilling the aspirations of the Sikkimese people to actively engage in democratic processes. This milestone not only transformed Sikkim's development trajectory but also bolstered India's national security.

To commemorate this momentous occasion, my government will undertake a year-long celebration featuring a diverse array of activities under the theme "Sunaulo Sikkim, Samridha Sikkim - Samarth Sikkim" (Golden Sikkim - Prosperous Sikkim - Capable Sikkim).

We are honored to announce that the Hon'ble Prime Minister will be invited to grace us as the chief guest for these celebrations. All departments have been directed to formulate comprehensive plans to ensure the success of these events.

We seek active participation and suggestions from all sectors of Sikkimese society to gather ideas, enhance our plans, and ensure a grand celebration that truly befits this significant occasion. Your involvement and input are crucial in making this celebration a memorable tribute to our state's rich history and bright future.

My dear citizens,

As we strive towards our vision of "Sunaulo Sikkim, Samridha Sikkim, Samarth Sikkim," we must address the pressing challenge of drug abuse. Recent AIIMS research reveals alarmingly high rates of substance abuse in Sikkim, with significant percentages using sedatives, cannabis, opioids, and inhalants. This crisis demands urgent action.

To tackle this issue, we have launched the Nasha Mukta Sikkim

campaign in line with Nasha Mukta Bharat, aiming to develop a comprehensive strategy for raising sustained awareness about the dangers of drug abuse. Drug abuse impacts families, communities, and our state as a whole, undermining individuals and fuelling crime.

To combat this crisis, we are implementing the following measures:

1. State Core Committee: Establishing a committee with Department Secretaries and the Chief Secretary as Chairman, with similar committees at District and Block levels.

2. Sahyogi Programme: Launching programmes in schools, colleges, institutions, government offices, and village communities to train stakeholders about the ill effects of drugs.

3. Anti-Drug Cells: Forming cells in schools and government departments, partnering with the Health and Education Departments to implement life skills education.

4. Parent Awareness Programmes: Conducting programmes during Parent-Teacher meetings and Gram Sabhas to educate about substance abuse.

5. Special Task Force: Creating a task force under the Police Department to address substance abuse.

6. Rehabilitation Centres: Enhancing human resources and support in counselling, infrastructure, and management.

7. Post-Rehabilitation Counselling: Providing continuous support and capacity building for rehabilitated individuals.

8. Primary Health Centres: Equipping centres with skilled counsellors and protocols for addiction treatment.

9. Community Vigilance Groups: Encouraging support for law enforcement in monitoring

substance use in localities.

I urge all mothers to take an active role in this campaign. Your vigilance and involvement are crucial. Please report any suspicious activities or instances of substance abuse that you observe. Your contributions will help create a safer and healthier environment for everyone.

Overcoming the crisis of drug abuse is a joint responsibility of individuals, families, the State Government, and society at large. Our youth are the lifeblood of the nation, and their energy is vital for the development of society and the country. It is essential for as many young people as possible to join the drug-free India campaign.

Today, we unite under the Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan and take a pledge to make our community, families, friends, and ourselves drug-free, because change begins with each of us. Let us all commit to making our state of Sikkim drug-free. I pledge to do everything within my power to contribute to a drug-free India.

As I conclude, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the winners of the State Meritorious Awards. Your dedication and service are vital to our progress, and I thank you for your exceptional contributions. Your efforts remind us that every step we take brings us closer to a more prosperous and equitable Sikkim.

I encourage everyone to actively participate in building our state and nation. Together, as Team Sikkim, let us move forward with unity and determination, working towards a future where everyone can succeed. Our journey continues with collaboration and progress.

Thank you, and happy Independence Day!

JAIHIND! JAISIKKIM!

