



SPEECH

BY

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HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR OF
ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

**THE CONFERENCE ON
'ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAMMES FOR THE NORTH
EASTERN STATES**

AT

GUWAHATI (ASSAM)

17TH APRIL, 2010

Your Excellency Smt Pratibha Devisingh Patil ji, The President of India
His Excellency The Governor of Assam
Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam
Hon'ble Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court and other senior justices of
Supreme Court and Gauhati High Court
Eminent Ministers, Jurists, Administrators, Officers, Educationists, Senior
Editors of Publications of eminence and Members of the Bar
Friends from the Media
My dear brothers and sisters

I deem it a matter of pride and privilege to be a part of this conference on Access to Justice and Socio-Economic Developmental Programmes for North-Eastern States, so thoughtfully conceived and taken to the implementation stage by the Hon'ble Chief Justice of India. It is also a privilege to be associated with this great and glorious Institution in the beautiful city of Gauhati on the festive occasion of Bohag Bihu. I have always wanted to be back in this city ever since I attended the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of the Gauhati High Court last year. Today, I am thankful to the North Eastern Regional Committee for Access to Justice and Socio-Economic Development Programs, Ministry of DoNER, IGNOU and National Legal Services Authority for having afforded me this opportunity. The presence of Her Excellency The President of India today in this gathering is a testimony of the high importance that she attaches to ensuring justice and socio-economic equality for all.

I am confident that we unanimously view North East as a unique part of the country with regard its cultural diversity and traditions. The majority of the people of the North East are simple, hardworking and patriotic. In fact, even in some of the remotest corners of Arunachal Pradesh that I have visited, such as Vijaynagar which takes 6 days marching distance from Miao, everyone speaks in Hindi and greet each other with 'JAI HIND'. This is exemplary indeed. The region is endowed with natural beauty and is extremely rich in natural resources, bio-diversity and hydro-power potential. It has the potential of becoming the gateway to the South-East Asia and thus speeding up the economic development of the country through this yet unexplored territory.

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However, this land-locked area also seems to be locked in a vicious circle of under-development. Many areas of the North East are governed by the 6th schedule to the Constitution and the separation of Judiciary from the executive is still under process, which is particularly true of my State – Arunachal Pradesh. Many of the societies here have their own customary laws and traditional dispute redressal systems. Although the region is under a common High Court, the variations in the actual access to justice from one part and the other, are striking. The system of adjudication of disputes among the various tribes is in accordance with the tribal customs and practices by their own institutions known as kebang, building, yalung or Mel or by the chiefs aided by village elders. This has been in vogue since times immemorial. The procedure and methodology of the said institution is very well understood by the people. The forum is available to the people at their doorstep. The tribes in Arunachal Pradesh have developed their own traditional customs and some of them have ripened into what we call customary laws and social practices which are binding on the members and by default acquire the status of law. Judicial consciousness has slowly started making its in-roads in this part of the country also, and people have now started approaching the formal judicial mechanisms for civil or criminal redressal. On the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, the government of Arunachal Pradesh has initiated separation of Judiciary from the Executive in the year 2006 with the creation of 2 Courts of District and Session Judges at Yupia and Tezu. The Hon'ble High Court has already made the selection of two eminent persons to function as District & Session Judges. Notwithstanding this the access of the common people of this area to this formal system is still very limited due to geographical, social and financial constraints. With this background, the timing and venue of this conference couldn't have been more appropriate.

I am highly impressed with the multi-pronged approach suggested by the Hon'ble Chief Justice of India for ensuring access to justice to the residents of this beautiful yet remote part of the country. His concept rightly includes:

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- a) Encouraging Awareness programs that generate academic debate and intellectual deliberation on the most critical issues and result in the creation of constructive and practical ideas that can be implemented for the benefit of the North-East
- b) Sensitization of Judicial officers regarding the particular challenges faced by the people from the North East, since it would help in ensuring speedy and efficacious justice.
- c) Confluence of Citizen's forums to promote access to justice which would go a long way in promoting public private partnership and generate societal involvement towards ameliorating their condition.
- d) Need for an inclusive society to stimulate developmental work through legal empowerment of communities.

To this comprehensive strategy, I would like to suggest addition of two more action points, namely

- a) Conducting studies and reaching a conclusion on how the traditional justice systems in vogue in many tribal societies of the North-East can be gradually integrated with the formal civil and criminal justice systems.
- b) Specialized judicial training for officers of Arunachal Pradesh where the judiciary has not yet been completely separated from the Executive.

I am positive that at the end of this two day conference, we will be able to come up with a road-map on how to promote and improve access to justice and socio-economic programmes to the people of this North Eastern Region. It is recommended that the proceedings of the conference be documented and be shared with the widest possible audience of opinion makers and intellectuals so that the ultimate output draws on the experience of all who can contribute towards this noble venture.

I wish the organizers well, and the conference a grand success.

Jai Hind.