

**'India's growth depends on northeastern States'**

Down to business:Dignitaries at the Advantage Assam Global Summit 2018 in Guwahati.Ritu Raj KonwarRituRajKonwar

The Centre has sanctioned Rs. 47,000 crore for 115 new railway lines and Rs. 90,000 for rural roads and National Highway projects in the region, he pointed out.

Mr. Modi also made it clear that the future of the northeast lies in its trade and cultural ties with the ASEAN, a group of countries with whom India has enjoyed thousands of years of relationship.

"Formal India-ASEAN ties may be 25 years old, but our association has been there for ages. So have been our ties with Bangladesh and Bhutan," the Prime Minister said. The country, he added, is moving towards qualitative change with a slew of measures for the poor and the middle class, as proposed in the Budget.

"But the Indian growth engine cannot run smoothly if the Northeast, which needs to develop fast, is left behind," he said.

Mr. Modi's Bhutanese counterpart, Dasho Tshering Tobgay said India's Act East Policy would be as much of an advantage for Bhutan as it would be for Assam. "For Bhutan, India is an elder sibling, not a big brother. And for India, Bhutan is a younger sibling. Our relationship with India begins with Assam, with which we share more than just a boundary," Mr. Tobgay added. But the Bhutanese Prime Minister virtually stole the thunder from host Assam and India, reminding that the Himalayan country offers more ease of doing business and is low on corruption.

"Bhutan is 85th among all countries in ease of doing business, and we are trying to break into the top 50 soon. Transparency International says we are 27th on the corruption index, and 13th on the global peace index, which indicates we are among the most stable countries," Mr. Tobgay added. He also referred to the International Monetary Fund's forecast of 11.2% GDP growth for Bhutan in 2018, which is the second fastest in the world.

"Besides, we offer the cheapest power in the world at Rs. 2.23 per unit, and thanks to a free trade agreement, India is our market. So Advantage Assam is Advantage Bhutan," he said. Apart from erratic supply, power in Assam for industrial units cost Rs. 6.20-7.25 per unit depending on the size.

A host of Union Ministers, including Suresh Prabhu, and heads of major corporate houses attended Saturday's inauguration of the two-day programme that the Sarbananda Sonowal-led Assam government is hosting.

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***Narendra Modi***

***Prime Minister***

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