

NORTHEAST SHOULD BE GROWTH DRIVER: PM

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Government policies & interventions for development in various Sectors and issues arising out of their design & implementation incl. Housing

Kicking off the BJP's campaign in poll-bound Manipur, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday made a pitch for oil palm plantations while envisaging the northeast as the driver of India's growth story.

Mr. Modi said previous governments had neglected the region and alienated its people until New Delhi was brought to the doorsteps of Manipur and the rest of the northeast after he became the Prime Minister in 2014.

"After Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose hoisted his Army's flag for the first time and called it the gateway to India's Independence, the northeast is now becoming the gateway to fulfilling the dreams of New India," Mr Modi said at a rally at Imphal after inaugurating 13 projects worth Rs. 1,850 crore and laying the foundation stone of nine others that would cost Rs. 2,950 crore.

He banked on farmers in the northeast to cash in on the Centre's Rs. 11,000-crore oil palm mission.

Reducing imports

"India spends thousands of crores of rupees in importing palm oil. Much of our mission to let the farmers benefit hugely from oil palm cultivation will happen in the northeast, including Manipur," he said against the backdrop of protests in the region against the initiative.

Mr. Modi accused the previous Congress government in Manipur of creating a divide between the people of Imphal Valley and the hills around it. While the valley is dominated by the largely Hindu Meitei community, the hills are inhabited by several tribal communities, many of whom are Christians.

He said the State's BJP-led coalition had bridged the hill-valley divide, and said the "double-engine government" had transformed Manipur from a "blockade State" into one ready with routes for international trade.

Mr. Modi said there was a time when Manipur was left to its fate but he brought the Government of India to the people's doorsteps in the State and its northeastern neighbours.

End to insurgency

"I asked the leaders, officers and Ministers to regularly visit the northeast, spend time and formulate need-based schemes. Five from the northeast are in the Union Ministry," he said.

He credited the Centre-State coordination for extinguishing the "fire of insurgency and security" in the northeast. "There is the light of peace and development. Hundreds of youth in the region have joined the mainstream of development by shunning guns," he said.

Protest against visit

A "lockdown" called by CorCom, a conglomeration of six extremist groups, had greeted Mr. Modi and his entourage after he landed in Imphal amid tight security.

In Tripura's capital Agartala, his second stop in the region, the Prime Minister highlighted the connectivity with adjoining Bangladesh to project the State as a gateway to usher in all-around development in the northeast.

The Prime Minister also inaugurated a Rs. 450-crore terminal building at Agartala's Maharaja Bir Bikram Airport and remotely launched the State-level Project Mission 100 of Vidyajyoti Schools and the Mukhyamantri Tripura Gram Samriddhi Yojana.

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