



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

BUDGET SPEECH
BY
CHIEF MINISTER
AND
THE MINISTER-IN-CHARGE
FINANCE DEPARTMENT

ON
17th MAY, 2023

Hon'ble Speaker Sir,

It's a matter of great pride and satisfaction for me personally as the Finance Minister of the Government of Sikkim to present this 5th Annual Budget for the fiscal year 2023-24 of our Government in this august House.

I would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the Hon'ble Speaker for his presence and guidance in this very auspicious occasion. I would also like to extend my thanks to all the Hon'ble Members of the Sikkim Legislative Assembly for their participation and support. Let me also fondly recall the immense contributions both in the past and at present made by the people of Sikkim in the building of modern Sikkim.

Historically, budget presentation has been a great occasion in Sikkim. The structure, composition and orientation of our budgets have undergone very visible and perceptible changes over the last few decades. People of Sikkim follow budget and keep keen interest as it touches them at all levels and in their multifarious activities.

JC White's Budget of 1889

Let us recall that late John Claude White, the first Political Officer in Sikkim under British Superintendency in 1887 was the founding official to prepare the first budget of Sikkim in 1889. He introduced quite a few immediate changes in the revenue, assessment and collection system with a view

to induct a modern budgetary system. This included introduction of receipt and expenditure sides and monetisation of the budgetary system.

The land, forest and excise were the major sources of revenue. Receipts from land revenue was ₹ 13585 (67 %), Forests was ₹ 2752 (13 %) and Excise was ₹ 1448 (7 %). With the miscellaneous revenues of ₹ 2551 the total revenue of Sikkim was estimated to be ₹ 20336. On the expenditure side, public works got the biggest share of ₹ 9742 (65 %) followed by Allowance to Raja of ₹ 4575 (31 %) and agriculture of ₹ 64 (0.42 %) and miscellaneous of ₹ 588 (3.58 %). The total expenditure was ₹ 14969. This was the budget of Sikkim in 1889.

It has undergone metamorphic changes over the last 13 decades. For instance, land revenue which contributed 67 percent of the total revenue in 1889 hardly contributed 1.74 percent of tax revenue in 2020-21. Similarly excise revenue of 7 percent in 1889 today stands at over 20 percent of tax revenue. The revenue from forest that constituted 13 percent of the total revenue in 1889 today contributes hardly 3 percent total non-tax revenue. Avenues of state revenues which did not at all exist then today is an overwhelming contributor. For instance, commercial tax constitutes over 74 % of the total tax revenue and power sector contributing over 52 % of total non-tax revenue in 2020-2021, both these subsectors did not figure at all in 1889.

Hon'ble Speaker Sir,

I mention all these historical data on our budgets mainly to drive home the point that the structure of Sikkimese economy has drastically changed. The contribution of agriculture in the States total Gross Domestic Product has remarkably decreased and there has been a simultaneous increase in the shares of industrial-manufacturing and services sectors.

The aspirations of our people are now different, much diverse and steadily becoming higher. The contributions of the Central Government in our development and non-development expenditures are enormous and growing in a galloping manner. Therefore, the development goals and strategies have to be more appropriate to meet the peoples' needs and to cater to Sikkim's and Nation's larger interests.

At the same time, the august House will be delighted to know that Sikkim now has the highest per capita income in the country which stood at ₹ 4,72,543 in 2021-22. Sikkim ranked 5th in the country and 2nd amongst all North Eastern States in the Nationwide survey on Happiness.

Our Development Goals and Strategies

Therefore, one of the most critical interventions our Government has been making in the last four years, is to set new goals and design appropriate strategies for the wider and all-round development of

Sikkim. In the budgets of last four fiscal years since our Government took over the governance of the State, we have emphasized on five crucial areas.

Firstly, we are refocusing on rejuvenating the rural economies wherein we have focused on both agricultural and non-agricultural activities. Besides the traditional crops, we are keenly inducting commercial crops. Dairy, piggery and other off farm activities have really picked up. We have made very many innovative interventions including popular scheme like “Mukhya Mantri Krishi Aatmanirbhar Yojana” that cover a band of 13 crops. We now have established production clusters with evolving Farmers Producing Organisations. We are encouraging the commercial banks, other financing and investment agencies to support the agriculture and allied sector.

Secondly, in the industrial activities we are making efforts to bring as much green industries as possible. These will gradually lead to setting up of both traditional industries like pharmaceuticals and breweries and non-traditional ventures like information technologies, food processing, green energy, green tourism and other green services.

When we successfully hosted two prestigious G 20 Engagement Group meetings in March 2023, our Government emphatically stated about our keenness to consolidate and sustain the organic farming. We want to make its core philosophy spread over to other sectors

and disciplines and other regions of India and outside. We sought four crucial collaborative supports from the diverse set of representatives from G 20 countries and organisations.

We requested for green technology that would enhance the productivity and yield in our very limited farmlands manned mostly by small and marginal farmers. We explored the possibility of entering into fair trade principles and practices to value chain arrangement so that our farmers get remunerative prices right at the farm gate in the rural vicinities of Sikkim. While placing our comparative advantages and core competence, we highlighted the potentials of value additions and processing facilities within the State that would create an organic niche in cardamom, ginger, turmeric, chillies, buckwheat and other millets, tea, fresh drinking water, flowers, fruits, traditional medicinal herbs, faith healers' abundant yet vanishing knowledge and farm animal products.

We sought their support in building capacities among the new generation farmers and train them on newer methods of organic farming. While focusing on our varieties of indigenous organic seeds and plants which have witnessed gradual erosion in their genetic pools, we invited a range of inter-disciplinary institutions that deal with training, research and experimentations, productivity enhancement, processing, marketing and to enable other sectors move to organic culture.

I personally appealed to all the distinguished B 20 and G 20 delegates to support us, invest in these four areas and make Sikkim a green agro-ecological destination of the global world.

Our officials are undertaking follow up actions and would soon involve the local entrepreneurs and other related institutions. Since this is a vital sector for the overall growth, our Government has fixed responsibilities for all departments towards realising the goals of acquiring substantive support and investment from both the G 20 partners and other countries.

Thirdly, given the distinct advantages, we have concentrated in some services sectors activities. We are targeting setting up of new tourism ventures, educational enterprises and health amenities.

Fourthly, eradication of poverty and inequality and sharing of prosperity with the people at the grass root has been a core area of our policy interventions. In this regard, the august house would be delighted to note that the first India Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) Report published by NITI Aayog in 2021 states that in terms of the headcount ratio, Sikkim with 3.82 percent has the third lowest percentage of population who are multidimensionally poor in India. The lowest is Kerala with 0.71 percent and the highest is in Bihar with 51.91 %.

While celebrating this achievement, we should not be complacent as in some indices of deprivations like cooking fuel, housing, bank accounts and assets we have to consciously and steadily improve our performance to be in the top five best in India.

Let me also inform the august House that as per the announcement, I made in our first budget in 2019 to undertake an in depth study of the state of poverty and inequality in Sikkim, the responsibility was given to the Directorate of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring & Evaluation (DESME) in the Government of Sikkim. DESME has now completed a very comprehensive household based study report aptly known as “Unnayan Survekshan 2022”. We shall soon look into the major findings in the report, identify the gaps and scope of actions and accordingly start making policy guidelines.

This august House would like to place on record its gratitude and thanks to the hardworking and dedicated professionals of DESME and also extend our profuse thanks to the Chief Economic Adviser for broadly monitoring and supervising the preparation of this first comprehensive “Unnayan Survekshan” of Sikkim.

Fourthly, all these ventures require physical connectivity, linkages with the markets and other infrastructures. That is the reason, we have been emphasizing on alternative highways both to connect with the national markets and also state highways.

Within the state the Government has constructed a number of roads and a number of them including 17 km Sangkhola Zingla Road are under construction.

There are tangible developments in both these fronts.

Siliguri- Rangpo railway line is likely to be completed soon. This will be extended to Gangtok and further up. National Highway 717A, connecting Bagrakote in West Bengal and Sikkim is also likely to be completed soon. It is being constructed and maintained by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL).

This is where we have made strong pleas for the construction of Multimodal Economic Corridor linking West Sikkim with the districts of eastern Nepal through Chewabhanjyang. It has been a traditional bilateral contact point between west Sikkim in India and Nepal. West Sikkim shares a common border with Province No 1 of Nepal. This Province No 1 has 14 districts and over 4.5 million population (15 % of Nepal's total population). Among the seven provinces, this eastern province has the second largest area of 25,905 sq kms (over 17 % of Nepal's total land area). This is one of the most dynamic economic geographies of Nepal. This may be a potential area for development of border trade post with Nepal in the future.

India has several significant national interests in Eastern Nepal. The Chewa Bhanjyang Corridor will further consolidate India's national security interests. Since this has a range of agricultural, plantation, industrial, commercial and tourism centres and burgeoning market, Eastern Nepal has remained a major market and investment zone for India. The proposed Integrated Check Posts with all modern amenities being designed and built by Land Port Authority of India between Kakadvitta (Nepal) and Panitanki (India) is only an indication of the commercial importance of this Eastern Nepal-West Bengal-Sikkim centric region.

Hon'ble Speaker Sir,

Therefore, we would soon constitute a Committee of Experts that would prepare a detailed project report (DPR) and provide a comprehensive way forward options. This report will also delineate the details of benefits and opportunities for the State of Sikkim.

Let me also state that in addition, a team of experts appointed by the Ministry of External Affairs and NEDFi have already visited the site, had deliberations with the stakeholders and are working on further details.

And finally, we are focusing on making the institutions of local governance as autonomous and capable. As a distinct departure from the past, for the

first time the entire state had the panchayat elections on a political manner. We would like to de-politicise the functioning of the Panchayats so that every rural household gets the best access to the extended facilities and benefits. At the state level, we are re-training, re-skilling the officials and adding value to the principles of effective, transparent and accountable governance.

Atmosphere of Doubts and Suspicions

Most of the problems and tensions that are faced by our Government in the last four years have in fact been inherited from the previous Government which ruled the state for a period of more than 2 decades. We have inherited institutions that were destroyed and made disoriented. We were handed over the policies and practices that were deeply truncated, distorted and harmful to the basic ethos and cultural ecology of Sikkim.

Our Government had to take over the staggering quantum of financial burden left behind by the previous Government. When we took over, we found nepotism, corruption, privatisation of state assets and personalization of decision-making process at its highest order.

The august house will agree that our Government has been able to overcome most of the distortions, deprivations and destructions of the previous government in the last four years. However, the doubts and suspicions are so deeply ingrained that this psychological phenomenon still raises its ugly heads again and again.

Strident actions against Climate Change

Several studies have shown that Sikkim and the Eastern Himalayas will be steadily and seriously affected by the global phenomenon of climate change. We are already confronting these in some indicative manner. Our glaciers are recording unusual melting, new glacial lakes are seen, forest fires have become regular, springs have started drying up and crops are infested by newer varieties of pests. We also see untimely torrential rains and haphazard snow fall. Flows in the rivers are now unpredictable. All these have huge adverse impact on agriculture, drinking water, food security, livelihood, ecology and settlements and communities.

Another critical dimension of climate change is a new variety of diseases and also large-scale natural calamities triggered by flash floods, glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF) and other emerging tipping points. The National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) under the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has just published the “Landslide Atlas of India” in February 2023. I was keen to understand where our State Sikkim stands in the ranking of landslide vulnerability. In the vulnerability ranking of 147 districts from 16 states and 2 union territories, I found Sikkim’s Namchi, Gangtok and Gyalshing districts have 8th, 9th and 20th ranking and Mangan district has 51st ranking. The most vulnerable districts in India are

Rudrprayag and Tehri Garhwal in Uttaranchal and Thrissur in Kerala and least vulnerable are Okha in Nagaland, Haridwar and Uddham Singh Nagar in Uttaranchal.

This shows our districts are highly landslide prone. This is on top of the fact that Sikkim figures in the high risk seismic-earthquake zone IV.

Sikkim has rich forest cover with 47.08% of its area under forests. This forest cover regularly experiences many forest fires thereby damaging large tracts of forests. A total of 2382.5 hectares of forest cover was lost during the last five years. The immediate fall out is the disruption of natural cycle including that of food availability. This food scarcity severely impacts upon endangered animals like Himalayan Black Bear, Red Panda and many other rare species and also threatens the livelihood of people.

This leads to a chain of human-animal conflicts. What we therefore, need is equipment suitable for firefighting in the steep hilly slopes. While the model Sikkim Fire and Emergency Services Bill circulated by the MHA has been approved by the Cabinet, Fire & Emergency Service Institute for Training Fire Safety personnel is being actively considered along with new Fire stations at various strategic places.

Hon'ble Speaker Sir,

In view of these vulnerabilities of our State, we shall undertake the following measures.

- i. We shall appoint a high-level Climate Change Impact and Mitigation Commission to study the likely impacts and also to suggest both short term and long term preparatory strategies and mitigation policies.
- ii. In this regard, our government has launched a very unique innovative novel green initiative namely Mero Rukh Mero Santati. It aims to strengthen the connect between parents, children and nature by planting 100 trees to celebrate the birth of a child. Watching the tree grow, as the baby grows, is a symbolic way of commemorating their symbiotic arrival and coexistence. This will be an appropriate response to the likely dislocation caused by climate change and would significantly contribute to national campaign of zero carbon goal.

Close to two thousand parents have already registered for the initiative to creating carbon neutral societies. The larger societal idea is to harmonise the relations where a child and a tree as they would cuddle and play with each other and also protect one another.
- iii. Our Government is seriously considering to introduce Electric Vehicles in Sikkim and gradually phase out the fuel based vehicles. For this to

happen we need to have both the policy and implementing institution in place. We hope to put this in place in course of this fiscal year.

- iv. Disasters are increasingly becoming a non-traditional security threats. Our Government is also actively undertaking the revamping of Civil Defence mechanism mainly to quickly and effectively handling various disasters. A major lesson of the devastating 2011 earthquake was the need for trained civil defence as the first response mechanism. We are therefore ensuring setting up of Civil Defence in all the districts, providing latest equipment for handling disasters and training of youth volunteers in search and rescue. The educational institutions are also made part of the mechanism.

Internal Security : Changing dimensions

Hon'ble Speaker Sir,

Sikkim is among the States with better safety record for women. Crimes against women are few and far between and women of the state experience a very safe environment. In Sikkim we believe and practice the age old Indian and mountain tradition where women are granted a high place of respect. The State Government has further prioritized women safety and a proposal to raise a Mahila Battalion of the India Reserve Battalion is under consideration. This Mahila Battalion commanded by women Police Officers will

further increase the stature of women in the society and provide confidence to the women of the State to actively pursue their varied roles in the society. We have also undertaken the raising of three companies of Women Commandos within this Mahila Battalion.

The Dial 112 project (ERSS) is fully implemented and functional in the State and is being monitored and supervised round the clock. Women tourists find the State very safe. We are launching a scheme to cover all urban areas and major tourist locations with CCTV surveillance. This would be primarily devoted to early warning technologies, preventive measures and scientific investigations related to women's security.

The Cyber Crime and Cyber Security has emerged as new threat with the proliferation and advancement of Digital technologies in the State. In order to deal with these emerging threats, Mission Cyber SAFAI (Sikkim Against Fraud Action Initiative) was launched in September 2020. Under the mission awareness on Cybercrimes has been disseminated through animated videos on social media platforms, Gram Sabhas, schools and colleges.

The State Government proposes to create one Cyber Police Station in each district under the supervision of SP Cyber-crimes. A proposal for amendment of IT Act to make Sub Inspector and above as Investigating Officer, is also under consideration.

This will ensure that more officers are available to investigate cybercrimes which is on the rise. Besides policing, public awareness campaigns on cybercrimes, are being undertaken regularly. Cyber Jagrookta is of prime importance for our local police and is being enhanced in the State.

We remain grateful to the Union Government for the Assistance Schemes on Police Modernisation. We are endeavouring to enhancing capabilities of the Police to use Cyber and Narco forensic tools more effectively. We would also like to engage our young IT savvy youths in this endeavour.

Another very serious non-traditional challenge is disruptive technology that actually emanate from both within and outside the country. These affect our communication system, dislocate our development models, induct destructive ideological and anti-national propaganda. It also imbibes false sense of deprivation and alienation among the youths. For instance, the penetration of powerful wave-based radio programmes and social media contents emanating from the neighbouring countries and have infused huge propaganda materials into the border state like ours. This is against both the interest of Sikkim and the country.

Sikkim today boasts of modernized and highly competent police force in the country. The fitness, turnout and promptness of Sikkim Police have been

appreciated by visiting dignitaries on various occasions. The State Government has passed the Sikkim Police Act 2008, dealing with comprehensive police management in the State. This Act is in consonance with the Model Police Act circulated by Govt. of India. The State has prioritized the right recruitment, systematic and scientific training, imbibing the latest technologies to ensure policing as not only an efficient force but also a disciplined and humane entity.

Education and Health

Our Government has been steadily increasing allocation in these two sectors since we took over the reins of governance.

This year, the allocation in education sector is 15 % and health sector is 7.02 % of the entire budgetary allocation.

In the last four years we have brought both the education and health sectors to the forefront of our human security campaign. We have been mentioning about our major achievements in various forum. From the free medical education to bringing newer universities in the rural areas, reorienting the curriculum and teaching practices as per the New Education Policy of the Government of India and constructing school building and play grounds to providing basic amenities in the schools and colleges, our Government has remained dedicated to doubly enhance the educational infrastructure and quality in the State.

To ensure immediate and emergency evacuation and timely access to medical facilities to the students, teachers and staff members, our Government has now provided ambulances with health workers to 8 colleges. These include Nar Bahadur Bhandari Degree College, Tadong; Sikkim Government College, Burtuk; Sikkim Government College, Rhenock; Namchi Government College, Kamrang; Sanchaman Limboo Government College, Gyalshing; Sikkim Government Arts College, Mangshila; Government Vocational College, Dentam and Sikkim Government Science College, Chakung.

i) Evacuation from the Conflict Zones

Like during the Corona pandemic in 2020 and Russia- Ukraine war related emergency evacuation of our students and other people engaged in various profession outside Sikkim in 2022, we have successfully and safely evacuated 128 students from Manipur during the recent disturbance of May 2023. We called this evacuation exercise in Manipur as Operation Gurans.

Last year we evacuated 26 Sikkimese students who were affected by sudden outbreak of war in Ukraine. Government of India under its Operation Ganga mission not only safely evacuated all the students and other Indians but hundreds of flights safely brought them back to India. I would like to extend our warmest gratitude and heartiest congratulations to Hon'ble Prime Minister

Shri Narendra Modi jyu for this historically successful evacuation from such a devastating zone.

Hon'ble Sir,

As announced and assured in the last years' budget, our government made efforts to give them secure and smooth facilitation to complete their studies well in time. We have done this in the last few months. We have provided ₹ 5 lakh to all the students returning to Ukraine to complete their studies and ₹ 3 lakh each to the students who decided to stay back in Sikkim and complete the studies.

ii) Bahini Scheme

Under the now popular Bahini Scheme, sanitary napkin vending machines are provided to all Government Schools. Incinerators are also being provided to schools under this. The scheme is aimed at providing easy access to hygienic provisions to the school girls, educating the young girls about the natural process of menstrual cycle and also giving easy and scientific disposal management of the used materials. Our government now proposes to extend this scheme to all Government colleges in the State. The Government is also encouraging the private educational institutions even at the university level to introduce similar measures.

iii) Exposure Visits

Government has introduced exposure visit to National/ State/ Commendation Awardee Teachers. This is aimed at constantly motivating teachers and incentivize the best performing teachers in Sikkim. Announced during the Teachers Day on 5th September, 2022, State Awardee teachers are sent for exposure trip within the country and National Awardee teachers are sent abroad. They can be accompanied by their spouses.

iv) Know your State Tours

To imbibe a degree of competition and also incentivize the students to shine academically, 180 meritorious students among the class XI toppers were sent for 5 days exposure tour to Kolkatta. 418 students among class IX toppers availed the opportunity to explore Sikkim.

v) Adhoc Teacher Regularization

Our Government for the first time made a scientific and long term policy for the regularization of adhoc teachers. Under this new policy introduced in 2021, 621 teachers of various categories have been regularized in the first phase. Before 2019, these adhoc teachers functioned in an atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity. Many of them were subjected to frequent transfers. There was high degree of nepotism in the process of regularizing these teachers.

This new policy has done away with nepotism, favouritism, and arbitrariness. The Government now expects that the teachers with these job and service security will fully devote to quality and innovative teaching.

vi) Land for NIT Campus :

Our government has allocated 100 acre land for the establishment of National Institute of Technology (NIT) campus at Khamdong. The Foundation stone of the campus was laid by the Hon'ble President of India on 4th November 2022.

Like in case of national university like Sikkim University, the land issue of NIT campus remained hanging for more than 12 years during the previous Government. As a result, campus could not be built and students, teachers and the entire Sikkimese society badly suffered.

vii) Construction of Tarundeep Rai Archery Academy has been started at Kitchudumra under Namchi District. The estimated cost of the project is ₹ 30 crore.

Taking IT to the rural areas

The Department of Information Technology, Government of Sikkim has initiated a project to set up an Overhead OFC Network in Soreng and Pakyong Districts. This will provide fibre optic connection to all GPUs of the

Soreng and Pakyong Districts with provision to establish Internet at every households in these Districts. These fiber optics shall be terminated at all GPU offices, Block Development Offices, Sub Divisional Magistrate Offices and District Administrative Centre under both Districts.

This uses the overhead technology where poles shall be erected and share with other ISPs/TSPs. Once 100% fiberization of the Districts are done, all public delivery offices shall be connected with Internet and schools, colleges, police station and health centres will also be covered. This will make the delivery system of public services efficient, faster and transparent. The total project cost for the two Districts is estimated at **₹ 120** crore.

New Tourist Attractions

The iconic 3.5 km Bhaleydhunga Ropeway with state-of-the-art technology from France was inaugurated by Hon'ble Finance Minister, Government of India on 28th February, 2023. This ropeway located in Mainam Wildlife Sanctuary is an engineering wonder that ascends from 1800 meters to a peak of 3500 meters above sea level. The Government is keen on completing this project with Skywalk and Support Facilities to make this an integral part of tourism map in the country.

The Government proposes to construct a 15 ft tall gun metal Statue of former Prime Minister of India Late Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee near the Atal Setu Bridge at Rangpo.

Womens' Welfare

The government is providing ₹ 2,000/- per month to women in the age category of 45 years to 59 years under the Sikkim Unmarried Women Pension Scheme.

The State Government has enhanced the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme from ₹ 1,000/- pm to ₹ 1,500/- pm for those under the age group of 60-69 years, ₹ 1,500/-pm to ₹ 2,000/- for 70-79 years age group, and ₹ 2,000/- to ₹ 2,500/- pm for 80 years and above.

Under the Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme also the Government has raised the pension from ₹ 1,500/- pm to ₹ 2,000/- pm and has relaxed the Widow Pension age from 40 years to 21 years.

Under the Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme, the pension amount has been raised from ₹ 1,500/- to ₹ 2,000/- pm.

Similarly, the Chief Minister's State Disability Pension has been raised from ₹ 1,000/- to ₹ 1,500/- per month.

Multi Village Water Supply Schemes

Jal Jeevan Mission of the Government of India is committed to provide functional household tap connection to every rural household with service level of 55 litres per capita per day (LPCD).

There are additional schemes where the Government is targeting water stressed areas in Sikkim. One of the identified areas is Budang-Kamarey, Central Pendam, West Pendam GPUs and adjoining areas in Pakyong District, where perennial local sources are not available throughout the year. Hence, JJM has proposed a Project to provide water supply from Changu/ Memechu Lake. With 46 km length of gravity main, 70 kms length of distribution network, 18 reservoir/storage tanks and 6355 house service connection, this Multi Village Water Supply Scheme is likely to cost ₹ 132.73 crore. This project once completed will cover 12 villages, 87 habitations, 6355 households and 21000 people.

Similar Multi Village Water Supply Scheme is being constructed in the water stressed are of Poklok-Denchung, Tinik-Chisopani & Salghari GPU in Namchi District. This scheme costing over ₹ 47 crore will draw water from Rangit river. This project once completed will cover 9 villages, 46 habitations, 2597 households and 12109 people. This project consists of 4 km length of gravity main, 94.27 kms length of distribution network, 17 reservoir/storage tanks and 2597 house service connection.

Excursion Fund for Media

Media has been playing a crucial role in building the modern-day Sikkim. Despite serious challenges brought about by non-traditional media instruments

like various social media, Sikkimese media persons and institutions have firmly and innovatively withstood the challenges. Our government intends to make our media more vibrant, innovative and competitive.

Let me also mention that in the last three decades of socio-political developments of Sikkim, at no point of time the media enjoyed total freedom and professional independence as it enjoyed in the last four years of our governance.

In our last budget of 2022-23, we announced Media Fellowship to enable our media persons to visit any development project in the country, evaluate the same, write a series of reports from the field and submit the full final report to the Government of Sikkim. We were partly able to implement the same. A handsome number of our media persons visited Indian Institute of Mass Communication in Mizoram and interacted with the professionals and experts in this national institution.

We shall continue to promote this project.

Other Socio-political Strides

In the last few months, we have witnessed quite a few upheavals and protests by the people of Sikkim. It has been rightly so.

While welcoming the judgements of the Hon'ble Supreme Court to extend the income tax exemptions to the

old settlers in Sikkim, the Government of Sikkim and the Sikkimese people at large were deeply hurt and widely saddened by some of the expressions in the judgement that purportedly mentioned the Sikkimese Nepalese as the “persons of foreign origin settled in Sikkim”.

This is despite the well documented history of the Sikkimese Nepalese being an integral part and original inhabitants of Sikkim along with the two other original inhabitants the Lepchas and the Bhutias. Like other Sikkimese original inhabitants, the Sikkimese Nepalese have immensely and protractedly contributed in the historical evolution and in the building of modern Sikkim.

The Sikkimese people at large and Sikkimese Nepalese in particular found these expressions/remarks in the Hon’ble Supreme Court’s judgement as derogatory, demeaning and factually incorrect. These expressions also amounted to a sense of insecurity, uncertainty and fear.

Our Government with the full support of the people of Sikkim immediately made appeals and review petitions for the removal of these expressions in the judgment of Hon’ble Supreme Court. Our fervent pleas were rightly conveyed to the Hon’ble Supreme Court by various agencies of the Government of India. Since then, the Hon’ble Supreme Court, the apex legal and justice institution of India, has permanently removed and legally erased the demeaning, hurting and

misleading expression of the Sikkimese Nepalese being the “persons of foreign origin settled in Sikkim”.

We all are fully aware that these inadvertent expressions and observations found place in the judgement by the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India dated 13 January 2023 on the writ petition (C) NO. 59 OF 2013 filed by the Association of Old Settlers of Sikkim primarily and essentially because the last Government led by the Sikkim Democratic Front never tried seriously and whole heartedly to address these sensitive and painful issues both before the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India and also outside with various Governmental agencies of the Union Government.

The last Government literally ignored and missed all the options and opportunities that were before them to provide the effective historical facts and correct perspective.

These few weeks however, displayed the Power of Unity and traditional Wisdom of the Sikkimese people. This represented the fruitful result of well-established peace and harmony in Sikkimese society and polity. And this demonstrated the consequence of unflinching perseverance and formidable will of the Sikkimese people.

Let me heartily congratulate all the Sikkimese people for their concerns, contributions and these historic achievements.

The Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi jyu has always shown his deep love and faith on the people of Sikkim in all situations and have profusely hailed their contributions in the making of modern India.

We are deeply touched by the highest degree of sensitivity, respect and urgency shown by the Hon'ble Supreme Court.

The Hon'ble Minister of Home Affairs Shri Amit Shah Jyu's communication and action in this hour of fear and uncertainty among the peace loving and harmonious Sikkimese people, have been both soothing and reassuring.

The Hon'ble Union Minister of Law and Justice Shri Kiran Riju jyu, so warmly assured us that Sikkimese Nepalese along with the Lepchas and the Bhutias will be unconditionally and under all circumstances protected under Article 371-F of the Constitution of India.

Our Government would also like to record our big applause to all the civil society organisations, the intellectuals, academics and students, professionals, women collectives and media fraternity of Sikkim for their concerns, efforts and effective voices.

I would like to personally thank our respected representatives in the Parliament of India and my

distinguished colleagues in the State Assembly and all the officials for their supports and initiatives to resolve this sensitive issue in a harmonious and legally sustained manner.

We would also place on record our thanks and gratitude for the concerns conveyed and solidarity demonstrated by all the well-wishers of Sikkim and Sikkimese people from various institutions and geographies of India.

All the Sikkimese people, like in the past, cherish that the old settlers will play crucial and focussed role in the future development of Sikkim.

The amendment of Finance Bill 2023 and the fresh two additional categorisation of Sikkimese therein naturally brought some more consternations among us in Sikkim. In this regard also the Finance Ministry has not only given us assurance about its operational limits that would not impinge upon the provisions of Article 371 F but we have also made firm representations to the Government of India including through the Sikkim Legislative Assembly resolution to review these new categorisations.

We shall soon take all the members of the Legislative Assembly and the Members of Parliament to New Delhi to seek further amendments to the categorisation made in the amended Finance Bill.

We would like to assure the august House that at no point of time we shall allow any agencies to fiddle with the sacrosanct provisions of Article 371F of the constitution of India.

However, let me also state that we have formidable challenges before us in near future to bring a definite and durable resolution to the pending issues. Like I mentioned in my last budget speech, we shall have to remain alert, steady and united. At the same time, let me assure the people of Sikkim that our Government will not leave any stone unturned to explore and find the permanent resolutions to all these longstanding issues.

These very critical issues include the reservations of Limbu and Tamang Seats in the State Assembly; Scheduled Tribe Status to the 12 left out castes of Sikkimese Nepali community; welcoming and ushering His Holiness the 17th Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje to the Rumtek Monastery; the continuation of the Registration of Companies Act, Sikkim, 1961 that was replaced by the Companies Act 2013 and of course, an alternative all-weather highway from the plainland to various parts of Sikkim.

It is pertinent to mention here that our Government has, for the past 3 years, been making budgetary provision to facilitate the visit of HH the Dalai Lama and the 17th Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje

to Sikkim. This year, a sum of ₹ 1 cr has been earmarked for the visit of the 17th Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje. Likewise, a sum of ₹ 2 cr has been provisioned for the visit of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in this budget.

Hon'ble Speaker Sir,

One growing concern for our State is the decline in Total Fertility Rate of our State. According to data from NFHS- 5, the total fertility rate in Sikkim is at 1.1 which is alarmingly below the replacement level. This decline has serious socio, demographic and economic implications for our State. As an immediate measure, our Government has increased the Maternity Leave and Paternity Leave of all Government employees. We have also extended the benefit of one increment for a second child and two increments for the third child of a government servant. For the general public, other than employees, cash incentives shall be provided. Moreover, our Government has introduced the Vatsalya Scheme under which an amount of ₹ 3 lakh shall be provided as financial assistance. This scheme will cover both Government employees and non-employees of the State.

Hon'ble Speaker Sir,

I would like to highlight some of the notable allocations that our Government has made in this budget:

1. In this current budget, our Government has taken all efforts to ensure that pending liabilities of the previous government like expenditure for Fair weather roads, land compensation for airport among others, rural foot bridges, water supply etc have been nullified to a large extent.
2. Our government has set aside a substantial amount for resettlement of Pathing Landslide victims.
3. Our government has enhanced the allocation for purchase of medicines for the veterinary sector by 4 times.
4. The Sirijunga Sacred Cave, a place highly venerated by the Limboo community came under the proposed alignment of the NHIDCL. Our government, to save the Sirijunga Sacred Cave, and as a mark of respect to the Limboo community has acquired the adjoining land for diverting the previous alignment so as to save the sacred Sirijunga Cave.
5. Our government has allocated adequate funds for the Skilled Youth Start Up Scheme so as to enable our youth to become self-reliant and independent.
6. For the maintenance and creation of new roads, our government has allocated ₹ 60.00 cr in this year's budget.

7. For improving the SNT bus services, our government has earmarked funds for the procurement of 10 AC buses and Tankers.
8. With the aim to improve the Home Stays running in the State, our government has defrayed substantial funds in the Last financial year and will further augment it in this budget.
9. Under the Chief Minister's Rural Housing Mission, our Government has successfully completed and closed the project. Moreover, under Sikkim Garib Awas Yojana, our Government has defrayed substantial funds in the Last financial year and will further augment it in this budget
10. For engaging our youth and providing better sports facilities, our government has earmarked ₹ 30.00 cr for the construction of various playgrounds.
11. Our government has also set aside considerable fund to promote and encourage local talent and artists in the field of performing arts.
12. For improvement of facilities in rural areas, our government has earmarked funds for the construction of Crematoriums, Samaj Ghars and Club Houses.
13. For the project "Design and Development of Gyalwa Lhatsun Chenpo Centre at Simik Lingzey Rapen and Badong for Sikkim Buddhism and Buddhist Craft, substantial fund has been provisioned.

Hon'ble Speaker Sir,

I shall now briefly mention the budgetary profile for the financial year 2023-24. Against a gross expenditure provision of ₹ 12146.51 crore, (Rupees twelve thousand one hundred forty six crore and fifty one lakh) the net outgo comes to ₹ 11806.51 crore (Rupees eleven thousand eight hundred six crores and fifty one lakh) after taking into account recoveries amounting to ₹ 340.00 crore (Rupees three hundred forty crore).

The fiscal deficit remains in adherence to the fiscal management targets set in the Sikkim Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2010, i.e. not more than 3 % of GSDP and 0.4% of GSDP linked to certain Power Sector reforms as per the recommendations of 15th Finance Commission. Besides, under the Scheme for Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment, Government of India has allowed financial assistance in the form of 50 year interest free loan upto 1% of GSDP over and above the normal borrowing ceiling.

The contribution from own Tax Revenue is of the order of ₹ 1726.95 crore (Rupees one thousand seven hundred twenty six crore and ninety five lakhs) and that of Non-Tax Revenue ₹ 1078.90 crore (Rupees one thousand seventy eight crores and ninety lakh).

The total gross expenditure includes allocations amounting to ₹ 1952.21 crore (Rupees one thousand nine hundred fifty two crore twenty one lakh) under the Centrally Sponsored Schemes.

The summarized account of the receipts and disbursements is detailed below and is incorporated in the budget.

Amount in Crore

Sl. No.	Receipts	
1.	Tax Revenue	₹ 1726.95
2.	Non-Tax Revenue	₹ 1078.90
3.	State's Share of Central Taxes	₹ 3963.23
4.	Grants-in-Aid	₹ 2593.33
5.	Gross Borrowings	₹ 2142.44
6.	Financial Assistance under the Scheme for Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment	₹ 449.89
7.	Recoveries of Loans and Advances	₹ 0.03
8.	Net of Public Accounts	₹ -97.74
	Total Receipts	₹ 11857.03
	Total Net Expenditure	₹ 11806.51

Let us once again march forward to fulfill our goals based on sustainable development policies for the benefit of the people of Sikkim. Let us re-dedicate ourselves to further peace and tranquility and ensure that the State grows to become an example of innovation and progress.

With these commitments, I commend the Budget for the year 2023-24 to the House for its kind consideration.

Jai Hind !

Jai Sikkim !