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Purvanchal steps up on its development journey

He cited the 341-km Purvanchal Expressway, which links Lucknow with Ghazipur, as one of the state's flagship infrastructure projects.

Besides reducing travel time between eastern UP and the National Capital Region, the six-lane expressway has improved access for businesses. The project includes an emergency airstrip at Sultanpur. He also highlighted the 91-km Gorakhpur Link Expressway, which connects Gorakhpur with the Purvanchal Expressway, reducing travel time to Lucknow to around three to three and a half hours.

The minister said aviation infrastructure has also expanded with the commissioning of Kushinagar International Airport, which is expected to strengthen the Buddhist tourism circuit and improve international connectivity for pilgrims and visitors.

Industrial infrastructure is also being strengthened.

Agarwal said Purvanchal's first flatted factory complex at the Gorakhpur Industrial Development Authority was functioning, providing ready-built manufacturing space for micro, small and medium enterprises

(MSMEs). Around 80 industrial units have been established at the facility, he said. Looking ahead, the state government is developing an industrial corridor along the Purvanchal Expressway, covering 12 districts.

The corridor will house garment parks, plastic parks, food-processing units, warehouses, logistics hubs and MSME clusters.

The objective, Agarwal said, is to attract private investment, create employment, and transform the expressway into an economic corridor. "With several large projects completed and new industrial and logistics hubs under development, Purvanchal is expected to play an increasingly important role in UP's goal of becoming a \$1 trillion economy."

Agarwal said Varanasi's development demonstrated that economic expansion and preservation of cultural heritage can go hand in hand. The city, he added, has emerged as an example of how investment in connectivity, tourism and industry could create centres of economic activity while retaining historical and religious significance.

Delivering the concluding address, state Transport Minister Dayashankar Singh said that today a person travelling from Meerut could reach Prayagraj in about five and a half to six hours. Earlier, it would take almost as much time just to travel to Delhi to catch a flight.

"Such is the improvement in connectivity in Purvanchal, made possible under the leadership of the Prime Minister and the chief minister, that it has opened up markets for products from the region," Singh said.

He said Banarasi sarees now had access to wider markets and stronger platforms. Every district is finding its own identity through its unique products.

"Talking about my own district, Ballia, we initially received recognition for bindis under the 'One District One Product' (ODOP) scheme. However, we felt that sattū (fine gram flour) was a more appropriate product because Ballia, situated between the Ganga and the Sarayu rivers, is known for its gram cultivation. Since much of the area is floodprone, farmers can often grow only one crop instead of two. We requested the chief minister

to include gram and sattū in the ODOP programme, and the proposal was accepted," Singh said.

As a result, the area under gram cultivation in Ballia has increased from about 4,300 hectares to nearly 5,800 hectares, he said.

Hansraj Vishwakarma, UP minister of state for MSMEs, said earlier the biggest obstacle was bad law and order and the threat of goons and extortion, which the current UP government had successfully managed to mitigate over a period of time.

"Today anyone is free to set up a business, whether it is a large industrial unit or a small enterprise, without fear or interference. There is no question of anyone receiving threatening phone calls," Vishwakarma said.

Experts talked of the industrial, agricultural and tourism potential of Purvanchal and what needed to be done.

They said though the state's eastern part had lots of potential and was emerging as a growth engine, problems in executing policies and corruption in some areas were putting hurdles in the way.