



Speech of  
**His Excellency Lt. General (Retd.) M.M. Lakhera**  
PVSM, AVSM, VSM

Governor of Mizoram and Administrator,  
Andaman and Nicobar Islands

At the 52<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of  
**The National Development Council**  
At New Delhi on 9<sup>th</sup> December, 2006

**Andaman and Nicobar Islands**

**Respected Pradhan Mantriji,  
Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission,  
Honourable Chief Ministers,  
Members of the National Development Council**

I am indeed grateful for this privilege of addressing this assembly of men and women of great esteem. Prime Minister Sir, the last two years have been a difficult time for our islands. A mega Earthquake and the ensuing Tsunami hit us on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004 destroying lives, infrastructure and livelihood options on a massive scale. By damaging houses, jetties, schools, anganwadis, health centers, power houses, roads, bridges, ships, boats, fishing nets, livestock and agriculture lands, it totally disrupted life in these islands. This was an unprecedented event in the life of the Islands. Deeper cultural, psychological and social impact of an event of this magnitude will unfold only over the years. But it is a testimony to the resilience of the people of the islands that daily life has since returned to near normalcy in these two years. Most of the infrastructure and livelihood options have now been restored to pre-Tsunami levels.

This however has not been an easy challenge. Not just because of the sheer scale of devastation but also because of the geographic remoteness of the islands from the mainland and from their capital, Port Blair. The long rainy season in the islands further made it impossible to work without regular interruptions. The task has been difficult and it is not over yet. The work of providing permanent shelter to the Tsunami affected families continues to be a challenge and it is now proceeding at an even pace.

In these efforts spearheaded by the administration, Honourable Member of Parliament, the representatives of the Panchayati Raj Institutions and the NGOs have made invaluable contributions. But none of it would have been possible without the proactive role played by Government of India in providing expertise, guidance, resources and necessary clearances.

The UT is now better equipped, its staff better trained and its people more sensitized about how to respond in the wake of such disasters. The community based disaster management plans will provide the overall framework for our response at the ground level. But now on the eve of the second anniversary of Tsunami, people of the Islands would like to move on and plan for a post-Tsunami future. Eleventh Plan offers us just such an opportunity. And these deliberations of the National Development Council could not have been better timed.

As we plan ahead, we have taken note of the approach paper prepared by the Planning Commission. Its focus on inclusive growth combines the economic imperative of faster growth with the democratic need to embrace all sections of the society. This is just as well since these two strengths, a resurgent economy and a thriving democracy, have earned India great admiration in the world. Our administration is much in agreement with the approach presented for the country by the Planning Commission. I would only like to point out that making economic growth *inclusive* is going to be a challenging task. This is particularly so because the strategy outlined for achieving this stands on two ambitious targets. These are: a massive infusion of public expenditure in the face of a legislative bound on fiscal deficit and 4.1% growth rate of agriculture on the back of a Tenth Plan projected growth rate of only 1.7%.

Our own strategy for the Andaman and Nicobar Islands draws inspiration from the approach paper but it has to be of necessity tailored to the specific demands of our island economy with all its uniqueness. As we finalise our Eleventh Plan in consultation with the PRIs, I would like to lay down the broad contours of our thinking. In these island territories we confront sea in more ways than one. There is the vast expanse of sea all around us and **there is the triumvirate of demands that compete with those of development, SEA: Strategic, Environmental, Aboriginal Tribal.** We consider ourselves privileged and not burdened by these demands. We are excited that we could be India's extended arm for bolstering her friendship with our neighbours in the South East Asia. We look forward to the day when because of our vast and rare biosphere wealth, we will be at the centre of Indian efforts in preservation of bio-diversity We are proud of being hosts to tribes that are of great significance to the entire mankind. We therefore

approach SEA demands as blessings and not as irritants. Our endeavour is to strike a delicate balance between these imperatives and those emanating from the legitimate developmental aspirations of the Islanders. Our approach to the Eleventh Plan mirrors this effort to build on complementarities rather than dwell on conflicts. A reflection of this approach is to be found in the **Six pillars of our developmental strategy. Together we can call them CHOICE:** Connectivity, High Value Agriculture, Oceanic wealth harnessing, IT enabled services, Communications and Eco-Tourism.

The sectoral focus of CHOICE finds a reflection in our manpower planning which aims at increasing the number of ITIs and polytechnic institutes and significantly enhancing the range and relevance of skills that are taught in them. A radical enlargement of computer education and a focused attention to teaching quality in our schools are essential components of this plan.

While income generation is a key goal of planning, it cannot be deemed to be successful unless it also leads to an improvement in human development indicators. The UT has better status than national average with respect to most of the more commonly used indicators. However, there is still much more that needs to be done. These indicators will be brought to center stage in our administrative monitoring as part of our effort to focus on outcomes rather than mere outlays. This focus will find programmatic reflection when we start delivering the pre-school learning component of the education sector through the Anganwadi centres, which will themselves be progressively shifted to primary schools to ensure better learning and nutritional status of our children. This change in monitoring focus will be accompanied by a plan for introduction of e-Governance on war footing to improve both in-house efficiency and efficiency in delivery of services to the citizens.

Most elements of CHOICE complement SEA goals. However, there are certain inevitable tensions too, which I shall refer to presently.

High Value agriculture with an accent on organic farming and sustainable

harvesting of oceanic wealth of nation's Exclusive Economic Zone are two key livelihood options that will drive the economy of these islands, apart from the exploitation of global opportunities for outsourcing of IT enabled services and an aggressive promotion of high-end private sector led eco-tourism. These four elements are eminently SEA compatible. The other two elements have to do with inter island connections.

Physical connectivity and communication network among the islands and of these islands with the mainland is a sine qua non of our development, as would be true for any archipelago that is so spread out as ours. Connectivity or lack of it, impinges on almost every aspect of life here from prices of items of daily use to attendance of teachers in schools to creation of jobs in the tourism sector to saving lives in disaster situations. We need to augment each of the three components of our multi-modal transport arrangement, air, road and water. Not all of this augmentation will be through public means since PPP will be our preferred method of building, acquisition and operation of transport vessels and their associated infrastructure. However, laying of communication infrastructure is being achieved mostly through the efforts of administration and those of ISRO, NIC and BSNL. During the next plan period we should have a State Wide Area Network, OFC network across northern islands and tapping for our purposes of sub-marine cable from Chennai to Singapore.

In general, there is no contradiction between these two elements of CHOICE and SEA objectives. If anything, they enhance our strategic preparedness. However there is one element, which continues to be a matter of great concern and anxiety in the Islands. This is to do with severe restrictions on the use of a road that is the only all weather mode of travel for about half of UT population to its capital. These restrictions were mandated to limit exposure of members of the aboriginal Jarwa tribe to the rest of the population. Given the importance of connectivity in the economic life of these Islands and the large number of people involved, we need to work on a more creative and practical solution.

Outside the CHOICE sectors, there are two areas that have engaged the attention of the administration; one is of immediate relevance and other not so immediate. Both

carry the potential of a certain tension with one or the other of the SEA goals.

The immediate one is about providing adequate drinking water supply to Port Blair town. The shortage situation, especially in the four non-rain months, may turn grave if we further delay implementation of projects for augmentation of water sources and improvement in delivery systems. An innovative rainwater-harvesting project, the Flat Bay Project, that has the potential of solving drinking water worries for decades to come, was not approved earlier due to environmental considerations. Tsunami has already damaged some of the mangroves that would have been lost due to the project. We seek a review in light of this. Source augmentation by other means is being pursued alongside efforts to improve efficiency of delivery system.

The not-so-immediate area is about a tantalizing proposition that will require a careful and open-minded weighing of strategic, environmental and developmental goals. This is about constructing a large trans-shipment and bunkering facility at the southern tip of these islands. With the support of the Planning Commission and Government of India, a wide-ranging techno-economic feasibility study is being commissioned shortly. The facility, if developed, has the potential of completely transforming the economy of the Islands and of also making a significant contribution to the national economy. It raises visions of a Singapore in the UT We are excited about the possibility. We hope that its monumental developmental potential is fully understood when it is weighed against competing considerations.

In the end, I would like to thank Honourable Prime Minister and the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission for affording me this opportunity to place our views before this significant body.

**Jai Hind**