



सत्यमेव जयते

SPEECH OF
HIS EXCELLENCY LT. GENERAL (RETD.) BHOPINDER SINGH,
PVSM, AVSM, VSM
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR
ISLANDS

AT THE 53RD MEETING
OF
THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
AT NEW DELHI ON 29TH MAY 2007

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

Ladies & Gentlemen,

I am indeed grateful for this privilege of addressing the National Development Council, an apex body envisaging development activities of the Nation. The last two and half years have been very difficult time for our islands. A mega Earthquake and the following Tsunami hit us on 26th December 2004 destroying lives, infrastructure and livelihood options on a massive scale by damaging houses, jetties, schools, anganwadis, health centres, 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 Islanders. The psychological and social impact of the destruction so caused will be recovered by passage of time. 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 and half 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 geographical remoteness of the islands from the mainland. The long rainy season in the islands further makes it impossible to work without regular interruptions. The task has been difficult and its 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. None of it would have been possible without the proactive role played by the Government of India in providing expertise, guidance, resources and necessary clearance.

I would like to thank the Hon'ble Prime Minister to have shown concern on food security and addressing the issue in the National Development Council to bring out remedial course of action for accelerating growth in agriculture sector, which inter alia bring out food security of nation. I would also thank the Planning Commission to bring out strategy for Eleventh Five Year Plan for agriculture sector and its critical issues to be sorted out. I have gone through the Conclusion and recommendation made by the Steering Committee on Agriculture for the 11th Five Year Plan. My Administration is in agreement with the broad direction and policies outlined in the

Agenda note circulated by the Planning Commission. In this context I would like to highlight some important facts, which have a direct bearing on the perspective planning for our Islands.

Agriculture is important to the UT for both livelihood option and food security. About 50% of UT population is directly dependent on agriculture and allied activities. Out of the total Geographical Area of 8249 Sq. Kms. of the Island Territory, 7171 Sq. Kms. (87%) of land is under forest cover. As such only about 13% of land is available for developmental purposes including Agriculture. The Tsunami has worsened this further out of 50,000 hec. of land (6%) available for Agriculture, about 4300 hec. (9%) has been permanently submerged in the Tsunami. In the remaining 45700 hec, 29000 hec. is having perennial Plantation Crops namely Coconut & Arecanut and 16700 hec. is available for paddy, fruits, vegetables pulses. The productivity of the land is also fairly low. To achieve the goal of 4% growth in Agriculture our endeavour is to increase the productivity through effective use of improved technology, better scientific practices, irrigation facilities extension delivery and farm mechanisation.

The island is a food deficit UT. Most of the food items consumed by the population like rice, wheat and pulses are imported

from mainland. Though paddy is one of the major crops grown in the UT still it has an overall deficit of rice availability. 50% of our requirement of rice and total requirement of wheat are imported from mainland. While Vegetables are marginally imported from mainland, 80% of pulses required is met from the mainland.

The territory is a rain fed area and only single crop practice is being followed. The agriculture and allied activities had a growth of 5.12% during 2001-2002 and 13.99% during 2002-2003 at constant prices 1993-1994. The low productivity is a serious concern for the Administration and keeping in view the limited availability of land and water, a multipronged strategy devolving a focus on high value agriculture, organic farming, multiple cropping, crop diversification and network of Rural Knowledge Centre is under implementation to address some of the main causes of income generation in agriculture and increase in productivity. There is no major or medium irrigation project in the Islands. The irrigation facilities are, therefore, confined to Rainwater Harvesting through minor irrigation ponds and check dams.

Although the landmass of our Islands is 0.25% of that of India, yet it accounts for 30% of the country's total Exclusive Economy Zone,

which has tremendous potential for futuristic exploration of natural resources including oil and gas. Interestingly we have only 1% of total number fishing boats in India, despite having 30% of the Exclusive Economic Zone of the country. About 6% of the population are either fully or partially dependant on fisheries for livelihood. The annual exploitable fishery potential is about 1.48 lac tonne which includes 60000 tonne deep sea Tuna. This means that around 44% of the fishing resources constitute Tunas. Due to lack of adequate infrastructure and bigger vessels the deep sea Tuna largely remains unexploited. Our current strategy is to give priority for Tuna resource exploitation. With the creation of infrastructure like Fish Landing Centres, Fishing Harbour Storage, processing and exporting facilities, and introduction of larger and modern vessels, the deep sea Tuna can be exploited and exported to neighbouring Asian Countries which will generate substantial employment to the local population. Most of the fish catch, which is about 28000 ton is consumed locally in fresh form. Small quantity of the fish catch is being exported to mainland/abroad in chilled/frozen/salted/dry form. The minor irrigation ponds are also used for fish culture and the catch are being consumed locally. My Administration is also planning to reconstruct and convert Andaman Fisheries Ltd. into a Major Corporation.

The Island territory is deficit in egg, meat and milk as per the norms of the National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad. Administration is taking efforts to increase the production of egg, meat and milk to become self sufficient. A new scheme on dairy development has been introduced in the 11th Five Year Plan to meet the shortages of dairy products.

The Administration would take all efforts to implement the policies and direction bought out in the note on "Agricultural strategy for Eleventh Plan" by the Planning Commission so as to increase the productivity of per unit of the scarce land and water through effective use of improved technology. Also my Administration request the Government of India to provide all assistance and expertise to the territory for increasing its productivity of food grain and other edible items not only to become self sufficient but also to increase the income of the farmers.

At the end, I would like to thank Hon'ble 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

