



**SPEECH
OF
SHRI MANIK SARKAR
CHIEF MINISTER
TRIPURA**

**53RD MEETING
OF
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL**

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NEW DELHI**

Hon'ble Prime Minister and distinguished members of the National Development Council

It is a matter of privilege for me to participate in the deliberations of the 53rd meeting of the National Development Council. At the outset, I take the opportunity to thank the Hon'ble Prime Minister for convening this meeting of the National Development Council for considering issues relating to food and agriculture. As Hon'ble Members are aware, in view of **relevance to the common man**, food, agriculture and related issues are of critical importance in the economic development of our country. Notwithstanding the impact of industrialization and urbanization, agriculture continues to be the core sector of the economy, on which over 60 per cent of the population is dependent for livelihood. Decline in the growth

rate in agriculture and reports of suicidal death by farmers in some parts of the country are matter of serious concern, which are required to be addressed on an urgent basis. I hope, the deliberations in the meeting of this highest planning body will lead to evolving a suitable strategy for taking appropriate corrective steps so that agriculture sector is revitalized for contributing to the national economy in general and solving the **problem of unemployment and poverty** in particular. In this context, I would like to mention a few specific issues for consideration.

2. Farmer and Land form the core of agriculture. Efforts for development of agriculture will remain a distant dream **unless available land is equitably distributed and ownership of the land is given to the actual tiller.** As a result of diversion of land for industrialization and

urbanization, available land for agriculture has been reducing continuously, which has added a new dimension to equitable distribution of land. Hon'ble Members may kindly recall that the need for distribution of land was specifically highlighted by me in earlier meeting of the Council, which I would like to further reiterate. It is necessary to **replicate the success stories of land reforms** in parts of the country in the other areas, which will go a long way in increasing production and productivity in agriculture as well as solving the problems of unemployment and poverty. In this context, I would like to mention that issues like opening up the **retail market for Direct Foreign Investment** are likely to adversely affect the interest of the small retailers as it would be extremely difficult for them to counter the tough and un-even competition from the Multi-Nationals and

will contribute to further marginalization along with resultant social consequences. Similarly the proposal for introducing **contract/corporate farming is likely to bring about "Reverse tenancy"**, in which big farmers would take over land from the small and marginal farmers on lease as a result of which the later will get further marginalized. It will only help entry of big companies driven by short-term profit motive into agriculture. This would in turn, make the small and marginal farmers as either labourers on their own land or get alienated from agriculture itself. Studies on contract/corporate farming in some of the States have clearly borne out these facts. Given these evident problems, it is quite clear that **contract/corporate farming is no solution to the crisis in agriculture** faced in the country. In fact, it is felt that it

will only intensify the crisis. For these reasons, we are totally opposed to this system.

3. Importance of agriculture in development of the Northeastern Region including Tripura hardly needs any elaboration. Because of **geographical disadvantage and inadequate infrastructure**, industrialization in the Northeastern region has been slow. Incidence of high level of **poverty is affecting growth of the service sector**. As such, agriculture will continue to play the most important role in economic development of the Northeastern region including Tripura.
4. So far as Tripura is concerned, due to historic reasons, the State has high density of population. As about 60 per cent of the land is recorded as forest and about two-third of the terrain is hilly, **availability of**

agricultural land is very small. In order to overcome this situation, the **policy on use of forestland is required to be modified on a pragmatic basis** so that land, which is the primary pre-requisite for agriculture, is made available for economic development and eradication of poverty without compromising with environmental conservation.

5. Notwithstanding existing constraints, serious efforts were made in Tripura for giving a boost to the agriculture sector by preparing a **Ten Years Perspective Plan** for achieving self-sufficiency in production of food grain, milk, meat, egg, fish, etc. for meeting internal requirement of the State as well as for sale outside. As a result of coordinated efforts, there has been improvement in production of rice and fish in particular. I would like to mention a few specific issues in this regard.

- i. **Adoption of the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) technology** for paddy cultivation has increased productivity of rice from 2.5 tones per ha. to about 3.5 tones per ha. By motivating the farmers, **seed replacement rate** in respect of high yielding and hybrid varieties has increased to 33 per cent. Application of lime for **neutralizing acidic nature of the soil** has been taken up on a pilot basis in one Block during 2006-07, which has potential to enhance productivity of the soil. Adequate financial and technical support is required for extending this system to the remaining areas.
- ii. Pineapple of Tripura has got a good market inside the country and abroad because of its high quality. The farmers are required to be provided

assistance in getting **required inputs and appropriate technology** for extension of pineapple cultivation over a longer duration. A **National Research Center for Pineapple** may be set up for giving a boost to pineapple production in Tripura as well as other Northeastern States.

- iii. Out of 1.17 lakh ha. irrigable land, about 90,853 ha. has been brought under **assured irrigation**. The guidelines of Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP) are **required to be amended** for (a) covering sources based on ground water, (b) revising the ceiling cost from Rs. 1.00 lakh to Rs. 2.5 lakh per ha. and (c) providing at least 15 per cent of the fund for renovation, repair etc. for meeting specific nature of problems faced in Tripura. Further, the Central

Water Commission should take steps for implementing the projects prepared by them, which have been languishing for more than a decade.

- iv. Tripura does not have any fertilizer plant. Because of geographical isolation, farmers are facing difficulties in **obtaining required quantity of fertilizer in time**. It is necessary to provide financial support for making fertilizer available so that the farmers are able to adopt the recommended practices in respect of paddy, pulses and other crops. Further support should be extended for popularizing use of bio-fertilizer in the State.
- v. As a result of specific interventions, **production of certified seeds** of high yielding variety of paddy has increased substantially and the State is likely to become surplus in seed

production. Suitable financial incentives need to be provided to the registered seed growers, which will not only motivate them but will also help in promoting agriculture in the other States of the region.

- vi. There are about 27,000 households belonging to **Scheduled Tribes in the State practicing shifting cultivation**, who need special attention for adopting better method so as to ensure that return from this practice is increased with due regards to environmental needs. Required financial assistance along with technological support is required to be provided for the purpose.
- vii. Existing infrastructure for **research and extension** in Tripura is inadequate, which is affecting extension and adoption of appropriate

technology. This aspect has special significance in the context of the need for crops diversification in general and promotion of horticulture, floriculture in particular. The existing unit of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) needs to be **upgraded** to a full-fledged institute for providing required research and technology support for promotion of agriculture in the State.

- viii. Concerted efforts involving creation of new water areas, improving existing water areas, adoption of appropriate technology, have **increased production of fish** by about 80 per cent during the 10th Five Year Plan. There is plan for increasing production by another 76 per cent by the end of the 11th Plan, for which Central Government should provide

assistance for subsidizing the cost of inputs for neutralizing the additional cost on account of transport over long distance to the State along with required technology and extension support.

- ix. Credit is an important input for promotion of agriculture. On account of inadequate banking infrastructure and low Credit Deposit (CD) ratio **provision of credit** for agriculture has been far from satisfactory in the State. Introduction of *Kisan Credit Card* for improving provision of credit to farmers has had only a marginal impact. It is necessary to simplify the procedure for ensuring that the farmers get adequate credit in time at soft rate of interest. The Nationalized Banks should take immediate step to

improve the CD ratio to 50 per cent from the existing level. Further particular emphasis should be given to provision of **micro-finance** to the Self Help Groups. This is required to be monitored closely for ensuring that the guidelines issued are implemented in letter and spirit.

- x. Tripura has potential to generate surplus agricultural and horticultural produces. Non-availability of **marketing infrastructure** like cold chain, storage, facilities for export at the Airport have been affecting marketing and provision of a reasonable price for the agricultural produces. Specific attention along with adequate financial provision shall have to be made for overcoming this situation.

6. There are several issues of vital importance for promotion of agriculture in the North-Eastern States including Tripura, of which I have dealt only a few specific ones. It is necessary to provide required support for overcoming the constraints and extending the successful experiences to remaining parts of the State in a time bound manner.

7. In the agenda note, there is reference to the fact that under the Constitution, **Agriculture is a State subject**. We are aware of the Constitutional provision and **taking steps for converting our challenges to opportunities**. However, **this will be possible only if adequate financial, managerial and technological supports are extended by the Central Government** to Tripura and other States of the Northeastern region. It is required to be appreciated that factors like

geographical isolation and inadequate infrastructure are **beyond the control** of the States. Even best of the efforts being made by the States are often resulting in limited success on account of such extraneous factors, which have put Tripura as well as other North-Eastern States at a distinct disadvantage. The strategy for supply of agri inputs including credit along with marketing facilities are required **to be provided to such States on a special footing** so as to ensure that existing potentials are exploited to the maximum extent and agriculture sector contribute to the development of the State as well as the Nation. In view of the peculiar nature of problems faced in the North-Eastern States, it is **necessary to fund all schemes on 90:10 basis during the 11th Plan. Further, improvement of connectivity has a crucial role in promoting any kind of development. It is, therefore,**

necessary to ensure that basic infrastructure like extension of railway line and dependable road network of standard specifications are provided in the shortest possible time.

8. Tripura has been making sincere efforts for increasing agricultural production and productivity, which has been helping to improve the position of generation of scope of jobs and eradication of poverty in gradual manner. The food availability scenario is also in the process of improvement. With required support from the Central Government, these measures will be pursued further for achieving the desired objective of achieving self-sufficiency in food as well as exporting the surplus to outside the State, the Region and the Country.

Thank you