

Speech of Shri Mufti Mohammad Syeed, Chief Minister, Jammu & Kashmir

50th National Development Council Meeting on 21st December 2002 at New Delhi

Respected Prime Minister and Distinguished Members of the National Development Council

It gives me immense pleasure to participate in this meeting of the National Development Council to approve the 10th Five Year Plan for the Country.

2. The 10th Five Year Plan Allocations for the State of Jammu and Kashmir have already been finalized by the previous Government and I have nothing much to say specifically on the strategies adopted or the thrust areas identified which are broadly in consonance with the guidelines of the Planning Commission. In passing, however, I would like to mention that the allocation of Rs. 14,500 crores is not enough to achieve the States' intended growth rate of 6.3%. I do have certain requests and suggestions. However, before I come to that, I would like to share a few thoughts with you.

3. My Government has come to power in such difficult circumstances, and at such a critical stage in the history of the State, that it has naturally to grapple with the challenges of unprecedented magnitude. During the last more than thirteen years, our people have had to swim through the rivers of fire and blood. All of us, who had chosen to enter into or remain in the arena of public life, during this period of turmoil and turbulence in the State, have had to contend with the ultimate peril not only to their own lives but also of those associated with us. Our State, which was once known as a paradise of peace and tranquility, had to suffer a tortuous and long journey of anguish, pain and brutalization. The place, which once held out a ray of hope for the Father of our Nation, grievously suffered under the dark clouds of violence, terror and despair. On occasions, even the bravest and the most optimistic amongst us, felt trapped in a long and forbidding tunnel of darkness with no promise of light at the other end. However, the resilience of our people, coupled with the will of the Nation's leadership, has not only regenerated and reinforced a sense of security in the majority of our people but has also, on the political front, ushered in a new dawn of hope.

4. The resolute declaration made by the Hon'ble Prime Minister from the ramparts of the Red Fort to ensure fair elections in our State was an act of great courage and statesmanship. Thanks to the great sense of duty and the commitment to democratic norms, shown by the Election Commission of India, the great words uttered from the

ramparts of the Red Fort, got translated into true deeds in the towns and villages, lanes and bye-lanes of our pain-stricken and, otherwise, desolate State.

5. Ladies and Gentlemen, even while I am conscious of the specific agenda, which is on the table for the consideration of this august forum, I cannot resist the temptation to say a few words about the peculiarity and the uniqueness of the challenges that face us and, indeed the entire Nation, in respect of the State of Jammu & Kashmir. We are one of the poorest States of the Union, with one of the lowest rates of literacy and a minimal infrastructure. We are almost at the bottom in terms of the network of roads, the consumption of electricity and the availability of other basic amenities of life even though the per capita collection of taxes in our State is about Rs.852 as compared to Rs.847, which is the national average for the other States. If I am correctly advised, the total foreign investment in the State has been a meager amount of 11 million dollars as compared to a total of about 47,000 million dollars in the entire Country. Likewise, in my State, which is generally termed as the crown of India and, which is, indeed the core of Indian Nationhood, the total investment of the Union Government in the public sector is about Rs.14 crores as compared to approximately Rs.194000 crores in the entire Country.

6. The people of my State, particularly those living in the Valley and Ladakh, remain substantially cut off from the Country sometimes for months during the winter season. There is no rail link with Kashmir, not to speak of Ladakh. These geographical disabilities and locational disadvantages have naturally bred a mentality of isolation and siege in some regions of the State. We have, therefore, lagged far behind, as compared to some of our lucky sister States, not only in terms of the economic development and industrialization, but also in a field of even greater political import, namely, emotional and cultural integration with the rest of the Country. It may sound paradoxical that while the dreadful phenomenon of militancy has uprooted lakhs of Kashmiris, mostly Pandits and even many Muslims, yet this very tragedy in our lives has opened a vista and mandated an imperative for emotional integration. The families of the thousands of Muslim boys and girls, who now receive education in various institutions of our sister States, have developed a stake in the peace and prosperity of those other States. They are now concerned not only about the conditions of weather, but also the political and social climate and environment of those States. Verily, as it has been said before, every cloud has a silver lining and every challenge carries in its womb an opportunity.

7. Even though militancy, violence and terror, that has wrecked havoc on the people of our State and has caused enormous concern to the entire Nation generally, and to the families

of those brave men, particularly, who are stationed in our State for the defence of our Nation, yet we are hopeful that we will not only survive but that we will emerge, from this crisis, with a greater confidence in our own strengths and a much deeper and abiding faith in our values and our institutions.

8. We are aware of the fact that apart from the baggage of history, which has plagued our relations with our neighbour, there have been other supporting causes of militancy and terror that have afflicted our State. Though none of these other causes can justify the acts of brutality and dehumanization that unleashing of terror entails, yet these other causes are real and they have created the kind of environment in which the germs of violence and the virus of terror naturally germinate, grow and spread.

9. The hitherto lack of peoples' faith in the integrity of electoral process and the efficacy of democratic institutions has been one of such major causes. Fortunately, the Nation, by its sterling act of courage and commitment, has removed this cause from the arena of political discourse. This change has done good not only for the people of the State, but it shall, I am sure, stand in good stead for the entire Nation here and everywhere.

10. The second major supporting cause of militancy has been peoples' lack of faith in the integrity of the leadership of the State, for which I do not hold any particular person or party responsible. Now, the ball is in our court and I assure you, Ladies and Gentlemen, that, with every fiber in our political body and with every impulse in our being, we are committed to build peoples' faith in the institutions of democracy and the process of governance in the State. We are conscious of the fact that our challenge is great but our resolve and our hope are even greater. We are committed to provide a government and administration, which is accountable, transparent, responsive, disciplined and result-oriented. Our policy of healing touch is intended to win over the hearts and minds of the people, where the battle of ideas has to be fought and won. We have to remove the supportive causes of militancy and terror, isolate, and finally overcome, the forces of hatred and destruction. My Government is committed to usher in an era of understanding and solidarity between the various regions and the communities of the State — to remove the causes of their alienation and mistrust and to involve them as equal partners, in the great task of decision-making and nation building in the State. This is an act of faith with us. We are determined to create an environment of understanding and fairness, peace and honour throughout the State.

11. Lastly, I would like to add that the problem of the under development and underemployment, which has plagued our State and is a major cause for creating an

environment of hopelessness, has to be overcome with deliberate speed. As a welfare state, it is our duty to provide a decent life, full of hope and promise to our people and provide them with the basic necessities and amenities to which every human being is entitled in a civilized society. Development will not only mean the discharge of a paramount duty by our Government, this process will also serve strategic interests of the Nation. The issues of security and development are closely inter-linked and inter-dependent. One is essential for the other. However, while we are acutely aware of our duties regarding fiscal reforms and financial discipline, we cannot, despite our best intentions and strong resolve, succeed on our own.

12. I am absolutely sure, Ladies and Gentlemen, that you and, in fact, the entire Nation is concerned about the welfare of the people of my State. I am sure that, in your hearts and minds, you not only entertain goodwill but also wish for peace and prosperity of my people. What is needed, may I say with great respect, is that this National reservoir of good-will and good wishes must get translated into an immediate and sustained National effort for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the people of my State. What we need is our own version of Marshall plan. I trust that, with the understanding and compassion of the entire Nation, and with the generous and timely moral and material support from you friends, my Government will be able to seize this golden opportunity that is knocking at our doors. We shall not let this movement pass in idleness and futility. We shall seize it firmly and up-front, and we shall hopefully triumph. This is my dream and I hope, dear friends, that this will also become our collective National goal.

13. I would now like to make certain suggestions to this highest forum of Planning for its kind, immediate and favourable consideration.

14. It has been our experience especially in the 9th Five Year Plan that the allocation was not matched by the Plan Outlays. For instance, while the outlay for the 9th Five Year Plan was Rs.9500 crores for J&K the approved outlays in the Annual Plans amounted to Rs.8850 crores only. It is hoped that the 10th Five Year Plan Allocation of Rs.14500 crores shall be provided in full to the State to avoid short-falls in achieving physical targets and loss of credibility with the people.

15. One phenomenon that has got highlighted specially during the 9th Five Year Plan period is that the loan component of the Annual Plans of the State has increased from 3.65% of the outlay for 1996-97 to about 24.62% of the approved outlay for the current year. The J&K State is a Special Category State and the Central Plan Assistance has been flowing according to the formula of 90% grant and 10% loan since 1990 because of

the increasing loan component, the annual increase in the size of the State Plan, while appearing dramatic on the face of it, is actually very nominal. The actual resource readily available for developmental activity is only Central Plan Assistance, whereas the loan, required to be raised, takes a lot of time to be sanctioned and at the end of the year the whole of it cannot be utilized. It is therefore, suggested that for Special Category States, increase in Annual Plan outlay should be provided by increasing the Central Plan Assistance and not by increasing the loan component. This way, the formula of devolution of plan assistance for the Special Category States will be implemented in true spirit.

16. The shortage of power in the State of J&K is a matter of great concern for the Government. This issue generates considerable criticism and disillusionment among the common people who expect un-interrupted supply of electricity in the acute winter of Kashmir and severe summer of Jammu. Against a peak demand of about 1437 MWs, the installed capacity in the State is just 547 MWs. Therefore, the State Government has to buy power from the National Grid at heavy cost and still resort to major cuts. It is necessary that this shortage is minimized and the potential available in the rivers of the State for hydel power is harnessed to the full. In this context, I would like to make a fervent appeal to the private entrepreneurs to come forward. I would also request the National Hydel Power Corporation to start work on the seven Projects that have been handed over to them in the State to generate about 3000 MWs of power by the year 2010.

17. The Ladakh region has an added problem. In view of its topography and huge costs involved, Micro-Hydel Projects could not be taken-up in this region. The power is supplied there through Generators, at very heavy cost, and through solar lighting. Ladakh is the only region not connected with the National Grid. The 220 KVA transmission line from Srinagar to Kargil to Leh, which is required to be constructed, shall cost nearly Rs.450 crores. The State Government has not been able to find the resources to build this transmission line. It is suggested that the Srinagar-Kargil-Leh grid line be treated as a National Project by the Government of India and it be funded accordingly so that about 62 MWs of power could be carried from the National Grid to Ladakh.

18. Tourism in the State had been one major source of economic development. It has suffered tremendously in the past decade. In the year 1988, the inflow of tourists to the Kashmir Valley alone was 7 lacs, whereas in the year 1993-94 it was less than 10,000. It has only now picked up slightly. We, however, expect a large number of tourists to visit the Valley and other places of tourist interest in the State in the near future, because normalcy is fast returning. For this purpose, the State \ Government has plans to improve and

expand the Tourism infrastructure. We would respectfully expect the Planning Commission and the Government of India to provide whatever assistance they can, in terms of expertise, consultancy and resources to help us to achieve this end. I appeal also to private investors to come forward to set up Tourism infrastructure of the highest quality on modern lines.

19. Ladies and Gentlemen, even though I may appear to be making a rather lengthy digression from the topic for today's deliberations, I feel inexorably impelled to do so by a compelling necessity of the task now assigned to me by history.

20. No one can arrest the ascent of our Nation towards the peaks of its great manifest destiny in the twenty - first century. We would proudly and actively like to be your partners, my esteemed friends, in this glorious journey of our great Nation. We are, of course, a little behind, you all, but if you extend your strong helping hand, we will catch up with you, and then, hand in hand and with our steps in unison, we shall resolutely walk with you on the path of prosperity. And then, hopefully, we shall not desert each other. Never. That is my dream and that shall also be my endeavour.

21. I am grateful to you all, for your patient and courteous hearing.