

Speech of Shri O. Ibobi Singh, Chief Minister, Manipur

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

Respected Prime Minister, Hon'ble Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, Hon'ble Chief Ministers Officers of the Central and State governments and Friends.

It is a privilege for me to participate in the 50th Meeting of the National Development Council to approve the draft Tenth Five Year Plan. Mr. Prime Minister, Sir, we wholeheartedly endorse the target of 8% average GDP growth for the period 2002 to 2007. We also endorse the proposed reduction of poverty ratio by 5% points by 2007 and by 15% points by 2012. We are in total agreement with the Plan document on the objective ensuring education for all children by 2003 and targeting creation of 50 million employment opportunities during the Tenth Plan period. We also share the development strategies adopted for growth of agriculture, rural development and economic infrastructure sectors.

2. I would like to take this opportunity to draw attention of this august gathering, and my colleagues from the other North Eastern States will agree with me, to the fact that while adoption of liberalization policy has led to channelising of investment and other resources, both by the domestic and foreign investors into the advanced States because they have the requisite administrative and physical infrastructure to respond rapidly to the emerging environment. On the other hand, the less developed States like the North Eastern States, have not benefited from the opportunities thrown up by the liberalization policy because of our weak administrative and physical infrastructure, it is desirable that during the Tenth Plan period the administrative and physical infrastructure is strengthened and, simultaneously, suitable mechanism evolved for directing investments into the less developed North Eastern States. In this context, we welcome the initiatives taken by the Department of Development of North Eastern Region under the able leadership of Shri Arun Shourie, Hon'ble Minister, DoNER. These need to be carried forward with the active involvement of the State Govts.

3. As you are aware, Sir, a large number of Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) with varying patterns are being implemented. Unfortunately, full benefits under such schemes could not be taken by most less developed States due to their inability to provide the State matching share. On the other hand, the already advanced States which could contribute their matching contribution could reap the benefits. We, therefore, propose that the Centrally Sponsored Schemes be funded by the Central Government in the same

ratio (90:10) as Plan financing in respect of the special category States.

4. We are pleased to note that due to certain initiatives taken by the Ministry of External Affairs, there has been improvement in our bilateral relations with some of our neighbouring countries like Myanmar. These initiatives should be carried forward to enable the North Eastern States to benefit from the trade with the South-East Asian countries, We should continue to assist our neighbours to establish infrastructural linkages with the bordering North Eastern States while simultaneously strengthening the infrastructure on our side too.

5. As you are aware, Sir, prior to independence the North Eastern Region had its trade and commerce linkages with commercial centres like Dhaka (through Sylhet) and Kolkata (through Sylhet and Dhaka). In the post-partition era, due to troubled bi-lateral relations, these trade and commerce links have ceased to exist. Although we are aware of the serious bilateral differences, we need to work towards restoring the historical linkages with Bangladesh to provide the much-needed fillip to the fledgeling economies of the North-Eastern States. This can partly be achieved by upgrading and extending the railway line from Silchar in South Assam to Jiribam and Imphal in Manipur and onwards into Myanmar. It could subsequently be extended to Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

6. Together with the railway line, the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways must, give focused attention to the upgradation of National Highway - 53 which links Silchar to Imphal in Manipur. If this project is implemented successfully during the Tenth Five Year Plan, we can expect to catalyze trade with Myanmar and revive the stagnant economies of the North-East Region. We are hopeful that such projects will also generate considerable employment for the growing number of our unemployed youths.

7. Another area of concern for us is the heavy incidence of customs duties on import of equipment under externally aided projects. We have been pleading that the Ministry of Finance should take a quick policy decision for exemption of customs duties on equipment imported under externally aided projects being implemented in the relatively backward North Eastern States. This may kindly be agreed in the larger public interest.

8. We are seriously concerned, Sir, at the downward trend in the award of successive Finance Commissions to the special category States. Even among the special category States, Manipur's share towards maintenance of assets is the lowest. The Eleventh Finance Commission had awarded only Rs.13.33 crore for maintenance of about 6700 kms of roads for five years as against Rs.210.00 crore for Meghalaya which has a similar

road length. We are afraid that unless about Rs.100.00 crores are provided annually by the Finance Ministry to offset the inadequate award by the Finance Commission, the assets created in the past may deteriorate considerably. The Planning Commission should also continue to provide Additional Central Assistance (ACA) to supplement our meager resource for Plan financing.

9. I would like to take this opportunity to request that the Central Government expedite implementation of the Tipaimukh Hydro Electric Project which will generate 1500 MW, prevent annual flooding of vast areas in the Barrak Valley, create vast irrigation potential and provide employment to a large number of people in one of the most remote areas of the North-East Region. The Ministry of Power may be advised to pay focused attention to this project.

10. Before I conclude I would like to thank the Prime Minister, his Cabinet colleagues and the Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission for preparation of an excellent Tenth Five Year Plan document. We are hopeful that through this plan the benefits of development will flow to the mass of our people.

Thank you, Sir.