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***Fifty First Meeting of the
National Development Council
on
Mid-Term Appraisal of
Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07)***

Speech of

His Excellency Prof. Ram Kapse *Lieutenant
Governor, Andaman & Nicobar Islands*

New Delhi 27-28 June, 2005

**Speech of His Excellency Prof.Ram Kapse, Lieutenant Governor,
Andaman & Nicobar Islands in the meeting of the
National Development Council on 27th and 28th June, 2005**

Respected Pradhan Mantriji, Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, Chief Ministers and Members of National Development Council.

I am indeed grateful for this opportunity to stand before this august gathering to express my deep gratitude to the Prime Minister, brother governors, Union Ministers, Chief Ministers of States and all those who stood by us in the days following the devastating earthquake and tsunami on 26th December 2004.

2. I am especially grateful to the Hon'ble Prime Minister, whose visit in January 2005, brought immediate relief through generous sanction of funds and gave added impetus to the relief and rehabilitation efforts. We are also grateful to the Ministry of Home Affairs for coordinating the rescue and relief activities in a professional manner under the direct supervision of Hon'ble Home Minister.

3. The constructive role played by Non-Government Organizations in the task of rehabilitation also needs special mention. Many are still working in the Islands in different fields of development.

4. I will be failing in my duty if I do not place on record my sincere thanks to the Common man of India. Donations flowed into the Lt. Governor's relief fund from all over India. The whole nation stood behind us like a rock in that hour of crisis. We thank one and all from the bottom of our heart.

5. The earthquake and tsunami caused severe damage to the life and property in the islands. The maximum damage has occurred in the Southern group of islands comprising the Nicobar District. About 1 0000 houses were fully damaged and 351 3 persons lost their lives in the tsunami. Most of the jetties of Nicobar District and South Andaman were devastated by the earthquake/ tsunami. This posed a stiff challenge to the Administration in carrying the relief materials to more than 40000 affected people and construction materials for about

10000 intermediate shelters. The biggest challenge was to construct these shelters before the onset of monsoon.

6. Despite such odds, thousands of tons of relief materials and more than fifteen thousand tons of construction materials were transported to the Southern Group of Islands. About 5000 Govt. officials were engaged in relief and rehabilitation work. It is the dedicated effort of these people that helped the territory to meet the dead-line and today about 9565 shelters have been completed and the affected families are housed in their intermediate shelters safe from the rains.

7. The damaged Govt. infrastructures such as Jetties, Bridges, Roads, Water Supply, Power Supply, Schools, Health Centres, Govt. accommodations and Offices, Police Stations, Communication Centres, Supply godowns etc. are being reconstructed on a war footing. The essential services were, however, restored immediately and are functional in temporary accommodations Together with the indomitable courage of the Islanders backed by the strong determination of our countrymen, we will overcome all these challenges.

8. Taking a positive attitude we would like to view this calamity as an opportunity to re-build the Islands in the appropriate lines. The convening of the National Development Council meeting at this juncture for an appraisal of the Plan process could not have been better timed.

9. We have closely perused the Mid-Term Appraisal of 10th Five Year Plan (2002-2007) document. The document is a comprehensive one with the perspective, objectives and development strategies clearly outlined. The midterm appraisal also highlights the targets for the remaining years of 10th Five Year Plan and beyond. We are happy to note that the focus of this NDC meeting is concentrated upon five major sectors of national importance viz. Agriculture, Irrigation & Water Management, Health & Education, Employment Programmes & Governance, Infrastructure Development, and State Finances & Resources.

10. So far as the livelihood sectors such as Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries are concerned, these have suffered the worst damage in the Andaman

and Nicobar Islands due to tsunami and the consequent ingress of sea water. We are working on a long-term plan to bring these livelihood sectors back on track. The emphasis is to bring more areas under high value items like spices, aromatic plants, floriculture and cashew plantation. As a part of diversification effort, it has been planned to move gradually from conventional agriculture to organic farming. In this regard we have already obtained the expertise of the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation. Since we do not have any major irrigation project in Andaman & Nicobar Islands, the focus has been on watershed management and rain water harvesting. Trainings are being imparted in these areas with the assistance of CARI and National Institute of Agriculture Extension Management.

11. In our opinion, the concept of "Rural Health Mission" will definitely bring about the desired result and will be of great help in strengthening the health care facility in remote areas, particularly in places like Andaman & Nicobar Islands. This would help us to further reduce the infant mortality rate, maternal mortality rate and death rate. May I in this context request the Hon'ble Chairman through this forum to consider our long pending request for relaxation in the population norms for establishment of sub-centre and Primary Health center specially for the remote areas? The people living in small islands are deprived of Primary Health care facility just for the reason that the island is not falling within the required population norms.

12. The spread of school education network has been wide enough to cover not only all the islands of the territory but also achieve hundred percent enrolment in the 6-14 age group. Implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan and extension of midday meal upto VIIIth Class have helped us to reduce the drop-out rate substantially. However, quality of education has been a cause of major concern. A judicious combination of conventional measures like periodic refresher courses for the teachers, proper supervision and assessment of work, regular involvement of parents in the school activities along with modern methods of auditing through independent external quality control bodies, accreditation of schools and computer based curricular studies should help us in achieving the desired quality level. Though absenteeism of teachers is not a major problem

with us, still we strongly feel that utilization of teachers in non-scholastic activities like Census, Surveys, Electoral works etc. should be minimized to help strengthen the educational activities in the schools.

13. We note with satisfaction the proposed development strategy for employment generation, poverty alleviation with targeted growth rate of 7.6 percent. This target is achievable if our policies are appropriately dovetailed towards improving efficiency, both in the public and private sectors and through combined efforts of all sections of the society. It may not be possible for the government alone to finance all resource needs. We have to therefore, tap all possible resources and also ensure a more conducive environment for private sector participation. Education, Health, Agriculture and allied sectors have to be made more attractive for private investment, as they are the backbone of a large industrial base.

14. The National Food for Work and other employment oriented programmes are effectively working in the Islands. Due to its remoteness and constraints of logistics, even basic necessities of life are required to be transported from the mainland. The cost of living which is very high, is further pushed up by the high shipping & airlines tariffs. It may not, therefore, be fair to impose the same standards/norms for poverty as in the mainland. Therefore, the BPL norms in respect of these islands need to be raised substantially. Similarly, the cost of construction materials and labour component are very high compared to mainland. The uniform upper ceiling policy for the assistance oriented schemes also needs to be reviewed.

15. We are very happy to note that the philosophy behind Panchayati Raj Institutions is gaining wider acceptance. This is a major step towards further decentralization of our democratic institutions. Some of the suggested measures which could be taken for effective transfer of funds/ functions/functionaries are -

- Preparation of an action plan for effective devolution.
- Clear demarcation of functions devolved to each tier.

- The devolution should be based on the strength and performance.
- All devolution to the PRIs may be done through legislation.

16. The Bharat Nirman scheme is being implemented in the Islands in true spirit. Road connectivity has been provided to most of the villages in Andaman & Nicobar irrespective of their population. The efforts are on to improve and upgrade those roads. Our area of concern, however, remains with the sea connectivity. The initial investment and the operational cost to maintain sea transportation between islands, foreshore, mainland to islands and vice versa works out to be very high. We are, however, working on a long term plan to become self reliant in this sector.

17. While all out efforts will be made by the UT Administration to implement the recommendations of the National Development Council, the concerted efforts, however, will remain concentrated on rebuilding of the damaged infrastructures and on resurgence from Tsunami. Providing shelter alone is not our only aim, but a shelter that is both cost effective and sustainable. Shelter related strategies should be a part of our environmental planning and should complement and preserve the ecology while taking what is required from it.

18. We agree that the energy-transport infrastructure is the backbone for any significant acceleration in development. Increasing energy tariffs to realistic levels and the need for environment-friendly fuels will definitely benefit us in the long run. At present the energy needs of the islands is mostly taken care of by the Diesel Generating power set-ups run by Electricity Department of UT Administration. There is a proposal to establish a single Member Joint Regulatory Commission. The Commission once established, will look into rationalization aspect of electricity tariff. Though the power tariffs is subsidized to off-set the high cost of running Diesel Generating power set-ups, the tariffs are however revised at regular intervals on the recommendation of the local Advisory Committee.

19. The rural water supply in Andaman & Nicobar Islands is done departmental[^] and the Urban Water Supply is the responsibility of the Port Blair Municipal

Council. The domestic water supply here is considerably subsidized. We find it difficult to realize 100% cost from the consumer due to high maintenance cost and for the reason that the households are spread at great distances. The move is to reduce the cost of distribution by adopting latest technologies.

20. With a fragile eco system, it is not possible for us to go in for any major interventions in the Industrial sector. Only Tourism, Fisheries and IT sectors offer some hope for economic development and employment generation in the islands. With the imposition of ban on wood based industries, and eviction of encroachers from forest land as a consequence of the orders of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, we are faced with a major problem of unemployment apart from a substantial loss of revenue from forest operations.

21. Tourism is one of the major sectors, which contributes to the economy of the islands and promotes generation of employment. We would like the Govt. of India to recognize the Tourism potential of the Islands and promote high-value-low-volume eco-tourism through a Tourism Task Force, directly under the highest supervision. These islands need greater funding for tourism, faster environmental clearances and, perhaps, most importantly a sustained level of publicity worldwide which would enable us to fully exploit its potential. In case tourism is not allowed to prosper because of over-restrictive environmental and security constraints, it could deprive these islands of an economic future and would most certainly lead to a massive unemployment problem.

22. In the Fisheries sector, we need to attract investment from the mainland both in respect of fishing as well as processing set-up. It is estimated that the EEZ around the A & N Islands have a massive fisheries potential of 2.435 lakh tons per annum. However, at present only about 11.5% of the potential is being exploited. The licensing regime for fishing trawlers has been liberalized but investment in this sector will not be forthcoming in good measure without enhancement of other related infrastructure. It also calls for long-term policies, especially in the area of liberalizing deep sea fishing, of course with safeguards.

23. I would also request for greater delegation of financial powers, so that the time bound reconstruction works can be sanctioned and implemented

expeditiously. I would also request to consider exemption of the UT Administration from the instructions issued under the Fiscal Prudence and Austerity Measures as imposed by the Ministry of Finance, for speeding up the reconstruction and rehabilitation work.

24. I would also renew my earlier request to consider development of South Eastern tip of Great Nicobar Island as a Trans-shipment port for container handling and bunkering and re-fuelling of international/national ships passing through the sea traffic route of South East Asia and beyond, as this route has great economic & strategic potential. Similarly the long pending initiatives of the ONGC to carry out hydrocarbon exploration in both eastern and western deep water offshore in the A & N Islands territorial waters, if activated, can largely contribute to the economic development of the Islands as well as to the nation.

25. I would like to urge all concerned for their full support to our endeavour to reconstruct and develop these tsunami devastated islands and restore it to its pristine glory. Once again, I thank Hon'ble Prime Minister and the Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission for giving me this opportunity to place our vows and views before this august National forum.

JAI-HIND