



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

**51<sup>ST</sup> MEETING OF THE**  
**NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL**

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NEW DELHI

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

1. I consider it a privilege to participate in the deliberations of the National Development Council, which is meeting for a discussion on the Mid Term Appraisal of the 10th Five Year Plan.

2. We had last met in the National Development Council in its 50th meeting held in December 2002 about two and half years back. In the meantime, there have been several changes. The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government supported by the Left Parties, after assuming power in March 2004, has promised that it would bring about faster growth with distributive justice. The National Common Minimum Programme, adopted by the new Government seeks to provide a responsible and responsive Government. However, there are still some areas of concern.

3. The Mid Term Appraisal of the 10th Plan has highlighted several positive developments as well as shortcomings. While the relatively higher rate of growth, reduction in rate of inflation etc in the first three years of the plan are healthy developments; there are areas of concern, on account of

- i) Lower growth rate of agriculture, in general and problems faced by the small and marginal farmers, in particular.
- ii) Inadequacy in infrastructure, both in rural and urban areas.
- iii) Gap in social indicators like education, health and gender related issues.
- iv) Decline in employment in the organized sector.
- v) Increase in in-equality, among the regions and the disadvantaged groups.
- vi) Imbalances in regional development.

4. In this backdrop, I would like to raise some fundamental issues. There are facts that are known to all but I wish to re-emphasize them because unless our basic aim is clear, results will not be achieved. Our main areas of concern are poverty 85 hunger, unemployment and illiteracy. After 58 years of independence and 55 years

of planning, our literacy rate is only 65%. That means that about 35% of our 103 crore population is illiterate. This is more than the entire population of North America. 26% of India's population is living below the poverty line - more than the population of USA. Crores of our youth are unemployed and many more are underemployed. Even these figures may be optimistic. The Planning Commission has been saying that Tripura has only about 40% people living below the poverty line while our own detailed surveys indicate that the figure is about 66%. The same may be true of other states. Can anyone contend that this state of affairs is unavoidable - in a country that has been blessed with every conceivable natural and human resource? This is because we have not attacked the root cause of the problems.

5. The majority of India's poor live in villages. Most of them subsist on agriculture and are landless. Unless people own the land on which they shed their sweat, they can never come out of the shackles of poverty and hunger. If our rural poor can be brought above the poverty line, India has the potential of becoming the second largest market in the world. For the market to expand and strengthen, focus has to be on agriculture & irrigation. Land redistribution to the poor has to be the highest priority in order to exploit productive capacity of our land. Critical infrastructure of roads, markets, power & telecommunication etc has to be built up. This would set the base for the industrial sector to grow along with generation of employment. At this stage, I would also like to sound a word of caution with regard to foreign direct investments. While we must seek technology and expertise, in fields where we are deficient, we must not open up areas where the country already has strengths and where such open access may hurt our economy and security. We should promote our own domestic industries by giving required support. Yet, today we see that strong profitable public sector undertakings are being weakened and disinvested. This wealth has been built by the toil & sweat of the country for its people. There can be no reason to allow plunder of this wealth.

6. With this initial observation, I would like to raise some issues, which are of special significance to Tripura. As Hon'ble Members are aware, geographical isolation and inadequate infrastructure have been endemic to the North Eastern Region. Private sector investment, which has been indicated and claimed as a major strength during the 10th Plan at the national level, has remained rather elusive in the Region due to several factors,

7. Tripura is surrounded by Bangladesh on three sides with an International border of 856 Km. the partition in 1947 was traumatic for Tripura. It was split into two parts, with almost all the revenue generating areas as well as rail/road, trade centers & infrastructure going to the then East Pakistan. Consequently, in Tripura, it has become essential to develop entire physical infrastructure de novo. Our location in the NE region makes this task extremely difficult. However, for economic development, infrastructure development has to be top priority. The present position is dismal. Non-availability of infrastructure has constrained exploitation of available natural resources like natural gas, forest, rubber, agri and horticulture produce. Over 66 percent of the population is living below the poverty line and over 4 lakh youth have been registered for employment. Such high incidence of poverty and unemployment has its impact on the youth, which is affecting development of Tripura adversely. I am confident that development of infrastructure, provision of quality education and health care along with opportunities of employment, will bring all our youth into the national mainstream.

8. I, therefore, urge the Hon'ble Prime Minister, who has an affectionate attachment with the Region as well as all the members of this august Council for addressing the problems of North East in a different manner. The Hon'ble Prime Minister in his letter dated 18th June 2005 asked for discussions on five main sectors, and I will structure my speech in the same manner.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT**

9. The top most requirements relate to provision of quality and dependable means of communication. We need

- Railway line upto Agartala, which has been declared as a National Project to be completed by March 2007 without further delay & drift. Broad gauging & extension upto Sabroom (from which the distance to Chittagong International Port is only 74 Km) needs to be completed the four years. The National Project should include gauging of the portion from Baraigram(Assam) to Kumarghat (Tripura), which was inadvertently left out from the national project.
- Railway link between Agartala and Akhaura (function in Bangladesh).
- Railway container services need to be extended to Agartala

- Four-lane state-of-the art National Highway linked to the East West corridor and the network of neighboring countries, This national highway should be aligned along the railway line.
- NH-44 connectivity with all Sub Divisional & Block head quarters in the State,
- An alternative national highway from Kukital to Sabroom (310 KM)
- Better air connectivity is required by development of the Agartala airport with required facilities for landing during inclement weather, adequate air services by the public sector and making it mandatory for the private airlines for covering all State capitals of NE region,
- Operationalization of airports at Kamalpur and Kailashahar and introduction of direct flight between Agartala and Delhi (via Kolkata or Guwahati). Benefits of low fare air services introduced by airlines like Air Deccan may also be extended on Kolkata-Agartala sector.
- Access to Chittagong Port is needed and if Ashuganj is made port of call, multi modal transport of goods can be achieved. Trans-shipment facilities through Bangladesh will immensely help Tripura.
- Despite our vigorous persuasion, there has been little in the telecommunication sector. In most part of the State, services unreliable. OFC link on trunk routes and upto block headquarter is yet to be provided. Mobile phone, Internet services along with introduction of Broadband Internet facility needs to be ensured through out the State.
- Production of power and its transmission is necessary. Natural is one of the major resources available in our State. ONGC and NEEPCO have come forward to set up power plants of 1000 MW and 280 MW respectively in the state. Their efforts may kindly be facilitated by the Central Government.
- In this regard, I would like to mention that as per the advise of the Central Government, we have corporatized our power sector and set up of a Regulatory Authority, which has been appreciated in national level.
- There is a need to integrate power projects of Tripura with the national grid by arranging for evacuation of power.

- Further, the concessional price of natural gas for the North East Region is required to be announced on a long-term basis for facilitating investments. The recent hike in gas price needs to be rolled back. Additional concession of natural gas for gas based power projects, which was discontinued from 01.04. 2003, needs to be continued.
- Review of the Electricity Act 2003 needs to be done in light of the Common Minimum Programme.
- PPP models of infrastructure funding are welcome but have not been found to be viable in the North East. Hence, funding needs are to be fulfilled by the Government. At the same time, the special incentive scheme for the NE region should not be diluted by extending it to other areas, so as to prevent investors from diverting their attention from the North East.
- Banks, Central Developmental Agencies and research institutions need to strengthen their presence in Tripura and other North Eastern states. Most of these are functioning with skeleton staff and very little investment.

## **AGRICULTURE, IRRIGATION AND WATER MANAGEMENT**

10. Agriculture is the main plank of our economy. We have made sincere efforts for distribution of land so as to ensure that this basic asset of production is with the primary producer. This is required to be supported by provision of irrigation along with supply of seeds, fertilizer, appropriate technology on the one hand, storage, processing, transport and marketing of the produce on the other. The plan strategy is required to be suitably revised for meeting these requirements. In particular, seed replacement needs to be encouraged by providing subsidy. Fertilizer prices need to be controlled and reduced by offering much higher level of subsidy for carriage of fertilizers upto Block levels. Considering the substantive gas availability in Tripura, Central Government may also consider setting up of a gas-based fertilizer plant in Tripura in the public sector that would meet the need of the entire North-Eastern region.

11. In so far as irrigation is concerned, the State Government has covered 70.08% of the irrigable area. However, the overall coverage of the cultivable area continues to be low (29.28%). Large investments are needed. AIBP scheme needs

to be revised to allow funding for creating ground water sources. It would, however, be premature to impose water charges on a population that is still so poor. Even then, on a pilot basis, the State Government has introduced token water charges in fifteen Blocks. Based on the public response, this experiment shall be extended further.

12. The flood and soil erosion continues to be a matter of serious concern that not only affects the daily lives during the rainy season but also substantially damages cultivable land. HonT>le Prime Minister had set up a Task Force on floods after major floods in the North-Eastern region in the last year. However, while I understand that the Task Force has submitted its recommendation, its report is yet to be implemented. It may also be pointed out that the Brahmaputra Board has not made any investment in the State ever since its inception. Flood control needs to be given due priority and adequate funding needs to be arranged.

## **HEALTH & EDUCATION**

13. We welcome the introduction of the National Rural Health Mission. However, I would like to state that the norms for setting up of PHC/CHC, particularly in the North-Eastern States, need to be made flexible considering the sparse population in several areas and the distance between habitations. It is also seen that recurring expenditures shall be borne only for a limited period. The taking over of this responsibility by the State Government needs to be phased out over a considerable period.

14. Tripura also needs a Medical College urgently. Due to its geographical inaccessibility, healthcare needs cannot be met unless there is a good medical college in the state. Government of India will need to support the state financially to achieve this.

15. Interventions suggested in the Mid Term Appraisal for adequate investment and other support in the primary health sector and taking steps like setting up of sanitation, public health etc. on mission mode appears to be relevant. I am sure, with required support from the Central Government, we will be able to make big changes in these areas by mobilizing people with the help of Panchayati Raj Institutions. In this context, I would request for larger role of the Central Government, especially for capacity building.

16. We need to give adequate attention to the development of human resources, which form the core of our resources. In this connection, I would like to state that as per the last Census 2001, Tripura had 73% literacy. Since then, we have made rapid improvements. In fact, as per the latest assessment, only about 3,500 children are yet to be enrolled. Dropout rates have impressively improved from 45% in the year 2001-02 to 19.58% presently at the primary level. An Education Commission has been set up by the State Government to improve the quality of education and implementation of its recommendations has helped the State.

17. We, however, need more Primary schools to ensure universal coverage. Absenteeism of teachers continues to be a problem. We feel that this can be minimized through the process of recruitment of teachers from local areas, involvement of guardians & elected local bodies and continued training and motivation of teachers. Vocationalisation of education needs to be given high emphasis, as SSA would generate a large literate population that would require employment. I would, therefore, suggest that the Central Government may come up with a major scheme for vocationalization of education which would involve design of courses, development of infrastructure and its funding.

18. Secondary education needs to be universalized. Therefore this is not a responsibility that can be left to the private sector. It is first & foremost the responsibility of the government to ensure secondary education to all. Private initiative is also welcome. We have made several attempts for inviting private organizations for setting up educational institutions. I would like to urge the central government that so far Tripura is concerned, the Central Government has to play a leading role in universalization of the secondary education as well. In this regard adequate financial support is required to be provided for provision of physical infrastructure, laboratory facilities, posting and training of teachers.

19. As regards higher education, our State has hardly any central institution. We have - been requesting for upgrading the Tripura University to a Central University and upgrading Tripura Engineering College to a National Institute of Technology (NIT), which are essential for enhancing the quality of education and imparting required skill to the students. In this context, we need provision of required fund and other support. Union Minister for HRD has announced to set one Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in the North Eastern Region. As Tripura has no major Central



Institution at present, it would be in the fitness of things to have the IIM in Tripura.

## **EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES AND GOVERNANCE**

20. In view of the acute nature of unemployment problem, it is necessary to assist the unemployed youth by provision of adequate credit for setting up self-employment ventures. Our experience in Tripura has not been encouraging. The Credit Deposit ratio of the nationalized Banks operating in our State has been around 30-35, which is much below the level the national level. Credit growth in the agricultural sector has to be doubled in three years, as per the announcement made by the Finance Minister. However, it has remained flat in Tripura. Provision of adequate credit needs special attention for overcoming fund constraints and solving the unemployment problem. I would request the Ministry of Finance and the Reserve Bank of India to look into the matter and take appropriate steps for simplifying the procedure and ensuring provision of adequate credit.

21. The proposed legislation for rural employment guarantee is welcome. Most importantly, there should be provision for fund in the legislation from the Central Government for to meet the requirement of wages to the workers. The state government feels that provision may also be kept for utilizing 3% of the total fund for provision of employment to the physically challenged and 30% to women workers. List of works allowed may be expanded for including creation of new water areas, construction of hatcheries, small go-downs, playgrounds, Anganwadi Centre & Social Education Centers etc. There is provision that application for work must be for at least 14 (fourteen) days of continuous work. This conditionality may be contrary to the interest of women. Therefore, the provision may be relaxed or deleted in the interest of working rural women. There should also be flexibility in starting new work. Provision of engaging a minimum of 50 (fifty) laborers to start new work may be made more flexible. This conditionality shall be an obstacle to start new work because of the fact that in Tripura, Gram Panchayats usually undertake projects, where 20-25 laborers are engaged at a time.

22. In view of reluctance of the private sector, it is necessary that various Central Govt., public sector undertaking like NPCC, NBCC etc make a bigger presence in Tripura in supplementing efforts of the State Government for undertaking various projects as per the time and costs schedules.

23. As far stability of tenures of officers is concerned, Tripura has a very good track record. Generally tenures are of two to three years, if not longer. I also feel that this is not an administrative problem. It is a problem of political will. In the context of North East, it is more a problem of cadre management. Special Incentives, like Home LTC once a year and a reasonably enhanced retention of house in Delhi may be considered for officers serving in the North Eastern states.

## **STATE FINANCES & RESOURCES**

24. Notwithstanding various constraints, our government has been able to avoid overdraft since 1998 as a result of financial discipline and prudent debt management. We are making efforts to improve the debt position and to increase revenue collection. The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Bill 2005 has been enacted in June 2005 and shall be implemented with due care. I would seek support of the Central Government in the following areas.

i) Debt Relief Package facility relating to the loan given by Central Government to the State Government may be extended to cover loans received by the State Government under small savings scheme and from PSUs such as LIC, HUDCO, REC etc.

ii) As per TFC award, our share of total divisible pool of central taxes has become reduced to 0.428% from the earlier 0.487%. It is therefore, suggested that State's share of central taxes may be increased from 30.5% to 33%. Out of this, at least 10% of the divisible pool central tax may be provided to the NE States. Infrastructure index and relevant factors like income - distance may be given due weightage.

iii) For Education and Health sectors, Twelfth Finance Commission has recommended grant of Rs. 16058.73 crore for 8 and 7 states respectively, which does not include Tripura. Besides, provision of grant for local bodies and State's specific need has been grossly inadequate. This matter may be looked into keeping in view the difficult nature of problems being faced by our State.

25. I feel our geographical isolation related constraints could be converted into a big opportunity by improving trade with Bangladesh. Right for transport of goods and

persons across Bangladesh as well as border trade will open new window opportunity both for our country and Bangladesh. I would request the Central Government to take up the matter with Bangladesh through the Ministry of External Affairs.

26. Last but for not the least, I would again like to reiterate that problems of the North Eastern States in general, Tripura in particular, are required to be looked into and a pragmatic and practical approach needs to be evolved for bringing about rapid development. In this context, I look forward to the active support of the Hon\*ble Prime Minister and all the members of the Council.

**Thank you.**