

Speech of Hon'ble Chief Minister, Tripura in the meeting of Chief Ministers of Northeastern States to be held under Chairmanship of Hon'ble Prime Minister on the 20th January 2014 at New Delhi.

Hon'ble Prime Minister, my esteemed colleague, Chief Minister of the other Northeastern States, Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, Member, Planning Commission and officials,

I would like to convey my best wishes to all of you for a happy and prosperous 2014. Inadequacy of physical infrastructure has been one of the main factors responsible for backwardness of the Northeastern region. While thanking the Hon'ble Prime Minister for convening this important meeting for looking into matter, I feel it has been much delayed and should have been held much earlier. Development of required infrastructure in Rail, Road, Air and Telecom connectivity, generation and distribution of power in the Northeastern region by adequate financial investment, deployment of manpower and close monitoring by concerned Central ministry is essential not only for development of the Northeastern region but also for unity and integrity of our country. While the state governments are required to extend necessary support, the primary responsibility in completion of the projects in time rests with the concerned Central ministries. I hope, today's deliberations will make a meaningful difference in this regard in completing the ongoing projectsexpeditiously and taking up other projects of critical importance on priority. In respect of the infrastructure projects of Tripura, I would like to draw attention to the following;

1. RAILWAYS

1.1 Extension and broad gauging of Agartala-Sabroom line (112 km)

- Progress of this project is too slow with reference to the target for completion by March 2015.
- Adequate financial provision is required to be made during 2014-15 for completing this project on a firm time schedule.
- Ministry of Environment & Forests should give necessary clearance for diversion of 172.856 hectare of forestland and 9.994 hectare of land in the Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary required for this project expeditiously.

1.2 Broad gauging of the Kumarghat-Agartala stretch (109 km)

- The progress is too slow for completion by the target date, March 2015.
- Only Rs 5 crore has been provided for 2013-14 against Rs 132 crore required for the project.
- Adequate resources need to be provided and implementation closely monitored for ensuring that this work goes on simultaneously with the gauge conversion of Lumding-Badarpur line and the entire stretch of Lumding-Badarpur-Churaibari-Agartala-Sabroom is commissioned at a time.

1.3 Gauge conversion of the Lumding-Silchar (421 km)

- As indicated in the presentation, this project should be completed and made operational by March 2015 by providing required resources and monitoring implementation closely.

1.4 Rail link between Agartala (India) and Akhaura (Bangladesh)

- Implementation of this project has been assigned to M/s IRCON. It may be pursued with Government of Bangladesh along with provision of required resources.

2. ROAD

2.1 Development of the National Highway No. 44

- Development of the National Highway No. 44 upto Sabroom was announced by Hon'ble Prime Minister during his visit to Tripura on the 29th October 2005. However, the physical progress of this important project is far from satisfactory

2.2 Development of the Agartala-Sabroom stretch (112 km).

- Keeping in view the traffic load between Agartala and Udaipur (Matabari) which is one of the important place of tourist importance, this stretch may be developed with 4-lane specification. Execution of this work in two packages, Agartala-Udaipur and Udaipur (Matabari)- Sabroom, may be pursued by the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways with adequate fund. This work should be monitored and completed on a time bound manner.

2.3 Development of the remaining stretch of Churaibari-Agartala (104 km)

- This work has been assigned to the State PWD. The State PWD has submitted relevant details. Required fund may be released for executing the work on a time bound manner. BRO may complete 10 km stretch sanctioned in its favour at the earliest.

2.4 Maintenance of National Highway-44

- Necessary financial support may be provided to the State PWD for maintenance of the Churaibari-Sabroom stretch of National Highway-44.

2.5 Development of the Kukital-Sabroom stretch (310 km) – Alternate National Highway

- This project needs to be sanctioned on top priority as it will provide an alternate in the event of any damage to the NH-44 due to earthquake, landslide, etc. and connect the tribal dominated areas of the state. The basic structure of this road has already been developed by the state government out its scarce resource. It may be mentioned that even with development of this road, National Highway network in Tripura would remain one of the lowest in the country.

2.6 Construction of the bridge over Feni River in Tripura for connecting with Bangladesh

- This project is of international significance in improving our bilateral relation, trade and commerce with Bangladesh, our neighbouring country. The project may be taken up on priority with required financial provision and intervention of the Ministry of External Affairs.

3. POWER

3.1 Evacuation and sale of surplus power

- With commissioning of the first unit of Palatana project, Tripura is having a surplus power of about 50 MW. Besides, OTPC will also have a surplus of about 50 MW. This position will increase further with commissioning of the second unit of Palatana and the power plant being set up by NEEPCO at Monarchak(104 MW) . Ministry of Power and Central PSUs like Power Grid Corporation may extend necessary assistance for evacuation and sale of this surplus power in the mainland states on priority.

3.2 Sale of surplus power to Bangladesh

- Request of Government of Bangladesh for purchase of power from India may be considered in the proper perspective as evacuation of power from OTPC plant in Tripura would require drawing of only nine kilometers of transmission line from Rabindranagar in Sonamura (in Tripura) to Comilla District (in Bangladesh) and would provide a quick solution to the problem of evacuation of surplus power.

4. AIRPORT

4.1 Development of Agartala Airport

- Airports Authority of India (AAI) may take up development of the Agartala Airport on priority, as per details finalized in consultation with the state government. Necessary environmental clearance for this project may be accorded expeditiously.

4.2 Making Kailasahar Airport operational

- Out of the three airports of Tripura, which are non-operative at present, Kailasahar Airport in Unakoti District may be developed and made operational on priority. The state government has initiated action for provision of required land. AAI may start the work on priority.

4.3 Early morning and late evening flights

- Early morning and late evening air connectivity between Agartala and Kolkata may be provided expeditiously by Air India or by any private airlines for convenience of the public.

4.4 Making Agartala an international airport

- Agartala Airport, which has the second largest air traffic in the region after Guwahati, may be made an international airport along with required facilities on priority for convenience of passengers travelling between Agartala and Dhaka and Chittagong in Bangladesh and other parts of the South-East Asia.

5. TELECOMMUNICATION

5.1 Habitation level connectivity

- The factual position given in the presentation is required to be corrected as Tripura has 1038 Gram Panchayats and ADC villages, out of which 145 number are yet to be

covered in respect of mobile phone connectivity and 680 in respect of internet connectivity. Notwithstanding financial constraint, the state government has provided Rs 4 crore to BSNL for improving its infrastructure. Provision of good quality equipment as per the latest technology along with required skilled manpower by BSNL is essential for providing quality services in the state. Other private telephone operators should also be asked to develop their facilities. Assistance under USOF may be provided for development of required of infrastructure in the rural areas.

5.2 Alternate telecom routing

- Alternate telecom routing through Akhaura (in Bangladesh) to Agartala as well as internet connectivity through Cox's Bazar (in Bangladesh) may be pursued with Bangladesh authorities vigorously for improving telecommunication facilities in the Northeastern region, including Tripura.

I have only briefly touched upon some of the major issues relating to infrastructure projects of Tripura and would sincerely hope that today's deliberation would ensure provision of adequate resources along with close monitoring for providing basic physical infrastructure in Tripura.

I also urge government of India that CD ratio of Banks in Tripura needs to be drastically improved. I request the active intervention of Government of India to increase the CD ratio in Tripura as well as in North Eastern States.

Thanking you.