

**49<sup>th</sup> meeting of National Development Council held on 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2001**

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

I am extremely happy to participate in this meeting of the National Development Council which has been convened to discuss various important agenda Items including the Approach Paper for the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan.

2. Hon'ble Prime Minister, my State is one of the remotely located States in the North Eastern Region with over 31 lakh population and a substantial percentage of people living below the poverty line including tribals and other weaker sections. Tripura is surrounded on three sides by an international border of over 850 KMs long with Bangladesh. It is now history that at the time of partition, comparatively developed areas including good cultivable land, important market centres, waterways and the railway line which was the main means of communication in the region, went to the other side. As a result, Tripura had and still has special problems unlike the other States.

3. While I appreciate the efforts put in by the Planning Commission in preparing the Approach Paper to the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan, we have some views to offer and, in some cases, these may be different particularly keeping in view the specific problems of the North Eastern Region including our State.

4. Thrust of the Tenth Plan should be on eradication of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment in a time bound manner. In the previous Five Year Plans, these issues were attended to with the objective of reducing poverty and illiteracy. But how long shall we wait for eradicating these basic problems. In the 54<sup>th</sup> year of Independence at least, we should strive to achieve the goal of eradication of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment. Therefore, it requires all out effective steps at all levels to achieve the long cherished goal.

5. While formulating the plan, proper assessment needs also to be made for finalization of the proper strategy for planning and development. Such assessment should be made on a State based criteria, taking into account the poverty percentage, per capita income, infrastructure index, human resource development index, etc. and the States may be grouped into 3 categories: advanced States, less advanced States and backward States. Such identification may be made zone-wise or region-wise and the imbalance in development reflected in the categorisation of the States must be addressed in the Plan document with proper steps suggested to remove it. Unless such imbalance among different States is removed, the Nation can not prosper, as the regional imbalance in development leads to frustration and encourages the tendency of disintegration.

6. Approach Paper to the Five Year Plan is a very valuable document for the development of the country. Before finalising such an important document, I feel that it should be discussed by the State Planning Boards in each State and their views and suggestions duly examined and considered before finalising it. For this purpose, a

period of one month or so may be provided. In such meetings of the State Planning Boards, a representative of the Planning Commission may also attend to ensure direct interaction and to explain, whenever necessary, the context and significance of the Approach Document. I would further suggest that the Approach document should also be sent to all recognised National and State Parties for offering their views. Considering the significance of the document, attempt should also be made to reach a national consensus on the development strategy cutting across political lines and through this process, participation of people in the planning, should be promoted and encouraged. After receipt of views and suggestions from the State Planning Boards as well as recognised Political Parties, another meeting of the NDC may be convened to finalise the approach document.

7. I also suggest that there should also be a separate strategy mentioned in the Approach Paper for the North Eastern Region, as I find that the Approach Paper does not make any specific mention about the special Problems of this region. The North Eastern Region lacks substantially in infrastructure. I also find that there is no mention about the recommendations of the Shukla Commission in the Approach Paper and how the projections made by the Commission for provision of infrastructure in this region are proposed to be fulfilled in the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan period. I would suggest that the strategy to be adopted during the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan for the development of the North Eastern Region should be clearly spelt out in the Approach Paper, so as to have a sharper focus on the problems of this Region.

8. In the monitorable targets for the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan in Chapter I of the Paper, I also find that there is no target fixed for increasing the rural connectivity which is important for the State like ours.

9. The most backward section of our society are the tribals who number almost seven to eight crores. Over the years, a lot has been said about their welfare and development. It needs to be recognised that the objective has not yet been realised upto the desired level. Now time has come to take up a holistic development programme on time bound basis to ensure rapid upliftment of the entire tribal population. Such holistic programme should improve and develop their economic life, status of education, health, promote their social and cultural traditions and habits and ensure their democratic rights.

10. Considering the acute problem of unemployment, thrust of the Tenth Plan needs to be on generation of additional employment, at the same time protecting the existing employment potential, so that the additional employment potential generated, can absorb the addition to the labour force. Therefore, while formulating the plan, assessment needs be made about the likely addition to the labour force including the likely number of job seekers coming from the educational sector during the plan period.

11. One of the major problems in the North Eastern Region is growing unemployment. In Tripura alone, there are over three lakh unemployed youth waiting for employment opportunities. Unemployment among the tribal youth in particular is

also the causes for a number of them joining the militant outfits and this problem, therefore, needs to be addressed during the 10<sup>th</sup> Plan both by Central and State Governments. Appreciating the urgency of the situation, our Government has launched during the current financial year, a new strategy for employment generation called 'Swavalamban' for providing self-employment avenues to the unemployed through skill upgradation. I would suggest that greater importance is given for skill upgradation and vocationalisation of education in the North Eastern Region to provide gainful employment opportunities to the unemployed youths.

12. There are some other recommendations made in the Approach Paper such as, reduction of Government employees by 2% without new recruitment during the next Five years. In the North Eastern States, fruits of development have not yet been able to percolate upto the desired level to the people particularly the weaker sections. Therefore, the Government is the largest employer to provide the much needed succour to the people. "An all pervasive role of govt. may have appeared necessary at a stage where private sector capabilities were under developed but the situation has changed dramatically...." may be true of most of India but not of NE region or Tripura. India truly lives in different centuries. In NE region, Government still have to play a role in most matters. New recruitment in areas where it is needed would have to be undertaken and unless there is substantial increase in investment in the North Eastern States during the next Five Year Plan period, it may be difficult to affect reduction in the number of Government employees in the manner suggested in the Approach Paper.

13. We welcome the suggestion to de-link the Externally Aided Projects from the General Budgetary Support (GBS). For Tripura, a number of projects for external funding are already under submission to the Government of India. We hope that the needs of the Special Category States would be given priority attention during consideration of these Projects. The Approach Paper also makes the suggestion for the Central assistance to take the form of project specific assistance. Over the last few years, we have seen this already taking place, leaving little flexibility to the States to device schemes suiting the particular areas and based on felt needs. I would, request this aspect may be looked into while finalizing the Approach Paper. The suggestion for a new system of the States entering into a MOU with the Planning Commission for drawal of Central assistance would be difficult to be followed in the case of North Eastern States.

14. As regards the Sectoral Policy Issues, while I am in general agreement with the proposed strategy outlined in the Approach Paper, some specific issues related to these sectors need to be addressed in the context of the North Eastern States. For example, Agriculture including Horticulture is the main occupation of people in rural Tripura. My State has already embarked upon a programme for attaining the self-sufficiency in food production during the period of next 10 years. Tripura has a number of horticulture fruits including pineapple. Due to locational disadvantage, our efforts to market pineapple by transporting it over the long circuitous route at trade centres like Kolkata have proved to be unviable. Therefore, there needs to be greater attention given for

value addition and food processing during the 10<sup>th</sup> Plan for the North Eastern States. Pineapple has another problem, as the entire crop is harvested during the two to two and half months' period in a year, making it difficult for a processing unit to run on pineapple alone. I understand that research has been undertaken for pineapple cultivation round the year in other countries. Agricultural research needs to address itself to such issues during the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan. My Government has drawn up Perspective Plans for horticulture development in the next ten years. Similar Perspective Plans have also been drawn up for development of animal resources and for fisheries development.

15. Among the poverty alleviation programmes, the suggestion to run SGSY without any subsidy would not be workable in the remote and underdeveloped areas of North Eastern Region. The wage employment programmes also would need to run in these areas to take care of unemployment, particularly during the lean seasons.

16. Besides, the Shukla Commission had recommended inclusion of rubber and tea in the list of forest species for plantations to be taken up in the forest areas, which constitute major part of our State inhabited by local tribal people. Our efforts in settling the Jhumias of shifting cultivators in the past have not succeeded much and if plantations of rubber and tea are allowed to be taken up for rehabilitation of the Jhumias in the forest areas, it would be possible to address their problem. I suggest that our Forest Conservation Act should be reviewed again so as to allow us the opportunities for the rehabilitation of tribals and other weaker sections of the society in these areas. This is not a problem with our State alone. In Tripura, a large chunk of area is covered by forests. More assistance needs also therefore, to be given for management of forest areas during the 10<sup>th</sup> Plan, including assistance for creating necessary infrastructure for management of forests.

17. The University system also needs to be assisted much more and the Approach Paper rightly lays emphasis on it besides laying emphasis on other sub-sectors. I would like also to submit here that one of the important aspects of our education policy should be its job orientation and this needs to be ensured during the Tenth Plan period.

18. Tripura has only a few KMs of railway line and decision has already been taken to extend the railway line to Agartala. The work on the same is also in progress. The allocations made for this project on year to year basis, unfortunately, are so meager that it may take many years for completing this project I would suggest that a clear cut policy directive be adopted for giving preference to the completion of pending projects of Railways in the North Eastern Region and particularly in Tripura during the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan period.

19. As regards the Governance reforms suggested in the Approach Paper, these need to be examined separately for taking a pragmatic view. In this direction, if the Planning Commission considers it necessary to constitute a separate Committee or Group, we would welcome the same.

20. As regards the second agenda item for the today's meeting, relating to the Report of NDC Committee on the criteria for allocation of funds under major rural poverty alleviation programmes, the continuation of the presently used criterion for allocation of funds to State for major rural poverty alleviation Programmes for the 9<sup>th</sup> Plan period, has been suggested. In so far as my State is concerned, I would submit that as the 1993-94 survey was taken up only in Assam, Assam's poverty percentage was used for other North Eastern States too. Based on this, the poverty percentage as per the methodology followed by the Expert Group for Tripura had worked out to 45.01. Tripura, being much more remotely located in the North East, the poverty percentage for Tripura would be much higher than that of the State of Assam. In fact, as per a BPL survey conducted by the State Government on 100% head-count basis in accordance with the Central guidelines, the poverty percentage in the State worked out to more than 73% in 1993-94. The poverty percentage of 45.01% is thus already on the lower side compared to the actual situation there and continuation of the adjusted formula with about 39% poverty percentage for Tripura as per the report of the NDC Committee, would not lead to fair distribution of funds to a State like Tripura, which has already remained deprived of its just allocation of funds under rural poverty alleviation programme in the past. I would, therefore, suggest that if any adjustment is to be made on the projection made by the Expert Group for a few States, the special category States in the North Eastern Region should be excluded from such adjustment, as the North Eastern States need special consideration.

21. As regards the agenda item 3, in so far as backward and resource-poor States like Tripura are concerned, Centrally Sponsored Schemes provide an important source of funds for development. We are, therefore, in favour of continuation of these schemes. Some of the schemes, which need to be implemented taking the local factors into account, may be transferred to the States, along with the resources, with an in-built provision to neutralise inflation in the years to come. We also hold the view that the proposal to place Uttaranchal on the list of Special Category States may be considered provided over-all Central assistance to be allotted to such States also increases. Otherwise, inclusion of new States may affect the flow of funds to the Special Category States.

22. There are a few other matters also, to which I wish to draw the attention of this House. We have the North Eastern Council to take care of the special needs of the North Eastern States. The budget estimates for the NEC for 2001-02, as agreed, unfortunately are quite inadequate, if the 9<sup>th</sup> Plan outlay earmarked for the NEC and the outlays provided during the first four years of the Plan period are taken into account, as with the current year's outlay a large part of the 9<sup>th</sup> Plan allocation remains unutilised. I suggest that, an outlay of at least Rs.1000 crores should be provided to the NEC every year, so that it can take care of the needs of the region. Re-organisation of NEC is another matter which is pending for long. This should be finalised urgently without further delay.

23. The planning process needs to be participative in approach instead of a top-down approach. With this objective in view, my Government has launched a programme for participatory planning called “Gramoday” based on formulation of area based plans at the village level keeping in view the perceived needs of the people and available resources. We have also launched special programmes for the welfare of the weaker sections, such as, the 25 point package programme for Scheduled Tribes and the 44 point package for Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Communities and Religious Minorities.

24. The Tenth Plan needs also to address itself to the problems of trade in the North Eastern Region with the neighbouring countries including Bangladesh. Tripura being surrounded on three sides by Bangladesh, there is an urgent need to strengthen trade ties with Bangladesh and to provide transit facilities for Tripura.

25. I am sure that with the deliberations held in today’s meeting, it would be possible to have more focussed attention on the developmental needs of the people.

***Thank You***