



SPEECH OF  
His Excellency  
**Dr. S. S. SIDHU**  
Governor of Meghalaya  
at  
**56<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session**  
of  
North Eastern Council  
held on  
**12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> May, 2008**  
at  
Agartala

- **Hon'ble Chairman and Union Minister DONER**

**Shri Mani Shankar Aiyarji,**

- **Distinguished Council Members and friends,**

I deem it a privilege to participate in this 56<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the North Eastern Council and to address the august House. Distinguished members will recall the purposeful interaction we had during the last meeting and I am confident the deliberations this time will be highly meaningful and productive.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Meghalaya "***The abode of cloud***" is blessed with its natural beauty. It has immense potential for becoming a paradise for tourists. The bountiful nature, picturesque landscape and pleasant climate of Meghalaya can attract both national and international tourists. Shillong which is traditionally known as the '*Scotland of the East*' is endowed with enormous natural resources. It has a good climate,

adequate rainfall, green forests and virgin land. I would strongly impress upon the Ministry concerned of the Government of India to expedite these issues for the benefit of the youth and the people of the State and the Region as a whole.

**ACTION TAKEN REPORT AT THE 55<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE NEC:**

As declared by the Chairman, NEC during the 55<sup>th</sup> NEC meeting, the 56<sup>th</sup> Plenary session of the NEC will submit a State-specific Action Taken Report (ATR) to ensure that suggestions made by the Member States do not get buried in the whole Report. As far as Meghalaya is concerned, the status of Action Taken Report is summarized below but have not been fully achieved due to time constraint in view of the just concluded Assembly Elections in the State:

- The draft State Education Policy is in the process of finalization and views from all sections of the society are being invited for making the State an educational

hub of the region. We hope to bring out the Education Policy of the State in three months' time from now.

- The State Sports Policy, in line with the National Sports Policy, is also under process and is expected to be finalized soon.
- The State Vision Document – 2020 has not been prepared yet. The views from various sections have been sought but due to elections, this process did not receive the desired thrust. The State Government suggest that the NEC may request National Institute of Public Finance & Policy to help the State of Meghalaya in the preparation of the State Vision Document 2020.
- The Concept Paper for Railway Projects in Meghalaya is ready and is being forwarded to Ministry of DONER, Ministry of Railways and the NEC.

- The Agriculture Department has been asked to take steps for getting the help of the APEDA for setting up of Packaging Centres in Meghalaya for promoting sales & export of horticulture products from the State.

## **ADOPTATION OF THE DOCUMENT ON POVERTY ERADICATION IN NER:**

‘Poverty Eradication’ is, perhaps, one of the issues that has posed a challenge to the Government of India since Independence. Despite many poverty alleviation programmes being implemented and special focus on inclusive growth, the poverty level does not seem to be within the manageable limits. Apparently, the absence of correct data base also prevents to some extent the factual estimate of the actual level of poverty incidence.

Poverty alleviation schemes are funded by the Government of India as Centrally Sponsored Schemes with a set of guidelines and provide the States with little or no option in changing or adapting these schemes to suit the

States' needs. Meghalaya has its own problems due to the fact that the Panchayati Raj System is not there as in other States whereas the Government of India guidelines specify that funds would have to be released to the concerned PRS.

### **VISION DOCUMENT 2020:**

I would also like to briefly touch upon the Vision Document of NER 2020. The National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP) have prepared a comprehensive draft of the Vision Document of the NER 2020. The draft has covered almost all the important aspects of development. The NER 2020 vision Report analyses a large survey which has reached some 40,000 households in eight States which indicates the steps for such changes and reflects the concerns and priorities of people at the grass roots. The NER Vision 2020 is an important initiative to bringing a peoples' approach to that of planning and development, a participatory mode that has tried to get viewpoints of various stakeholders as well as a range of people, especially from the rural area, to highlight priorities for ordinary people.

The Vision Document has been able to broadly diagnose the challenges and developmental requirements of the region and specify the economic roadmap for 2020. However, emphasis is also essential for the emotional integration of the region and to indicate the various instruments and policies that are required to bring this region culturally and emotionally closer with people from the other parts of the country. Specific interventions are required to be flagged to sensitize the region's cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity to other parts so that – as pointed out in the opening words of the document's introduction, - the *“rainbow country ..... extraordinarily diverse and colorful, mysterious when seen through parted clouds”* can be seen and understood.

While various strategies and institutional arrangements have been clearly identified for achieving the developmental goals of the vision document, specific interventions needed for creating greater sensitivity and understanding for policy makers from outside the region elaborated specifically while framing schemes and projects for this region. It is also

important that the project are specifically tailored so as to fit into the region's socio-cultural and administrative structures rather than have a uniform all India applicability in terms of norms and guidelines.

'Land' – which is a prerequisite for development and investment has to be given sharper focus in the North East Vision Document. The land system in the North East is different from that of other parts of the country. Land in the region belongs mainly to clan, community or private individuals in the hill areas and only a limited portion belongs to the government. For any developmental strategy to become viable the acquisition of land is of crucial importance in the North East region. This cost needs to be factored into all developmental works and projects in the region.

The implementation of the developmental strategy and vision requires resources. The document has underlined the raising of these resources in general terms and places the burden of raising the resources required for



development on the states. While the states will need to take steps to plug loopholes in taxes and non-tax revenue and improve collection of taxes, the scope for raising any substantial resources required for development of the region is limited as per the vision document. There is a need to specify the other resources in the document that can be tapped for achieving the goals of the developmental strategy for the region.

The traditional institutions must also be moulded in true democratic fashion and restructured for linkage in governance and delivery with accountability. The State Governments in the region will require to examine this aspect and consider legislature on these traditional institution to make them in tune with the principles of responsibility and accountability found in modern institutions of governance.

#### **NEC'S BUDGET 2008-09 ALLOCATION:**

The approved 10<sup>th</sup> Plan outlay of the NEC was Rs. 3,500.00 crores. Meghalaya received a share of Rs. 132.49 crores

during the 10<sup>th</sup> Plan of the NEC out of which Rs. 95.31 crores is for the Roads & Bridges sector and Rs. 37.18 crores for other sectors inclusive of Power, Agriculture & Allied Services, Tourism, Sports etc. So far, the State of Meghalaya has received only an amount of Rs. 14.06 crores out of which Rs. 13.43 crores is for the on-going Roads & Bridges projects only.

Meghalaya has projected its requirement of Rs. 1200.00 crores to the NEC for the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan. For the Annual Plan 2007-08, Meghalaya has also submitted schemes to the NEC worth Rs. 77.09 crores. I request the Planning Commission to approve the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan size of the NEC at an outlay of Rs. 12,487.54 crores as proposed and to make substantial allocations during successive Annual Plans so that meaningful investments can be made for the development of the Region.

For the Annual Plan 2008-09, the NEC has proposed Annual Plan size with two alternatives, viz: either Rs. 700.00 crores or Rs. 1,200.00 crores and the State of Meghalaya are still

waiting for instructions from the NEC before submitting the schemes for the year 2008-09.

**STATE-WISE TOURISM INCENTIVE PACKAGE FOR LTC AND OTHER DOMESTIC TOURISTS:**

Tourism in Meghalaya has gained momentum over the years. The Government accords due priority to Tourism infrastructure and Tourism Services. There has been gradual increase in the arrival of foreign tourists in the State. With the State having vast potentials in eco-tourism, the endeavour of the State Government is to tap the abundant natural resources for tourism development with people's participation which would generate both income and employment to the people of the State. Eco-tourism involving the local communities with highlights of caves, rivers, bioresources and ethnic diversity has bright prospects. This will build capacities, improve livelihood and allow tourists to experience the North Eastern Region in an authentic sense through mission-mode approach.

**ACTION TAKEN REPORT ON DECISIONS TAKEN IN  
NEC SECTORAL SUMMITS:**

I would like to take this opportunity briefly sum up the action taken report on the various sectoral summits are as follows:

**1<sup>st</sup> SECTORAL SUMMIT ON POWER :**

In line with the Pasighat Declaration, the State of Meghalaya has a power policy (2007). The Transmission & Distribution Master Plans has been informed to the Sub-Committee.

**2<sup>nd</sup> SECTORAL SUMMIT ON ROADS:**

The State PWD is up-dating the long term Perspective Plan already prepared earlier to cover all aspects of road connectivity and for its incorporation in the Master Plan of the NER.

**3<sup>rd</sup> SECTORAL SUMMIT ON IRRIGATION, FLOOD  
CONTROL & WATER TRANSPORT:**

A number of schemes for the flood-ravaged areas of Garo Hills has been proposed to the Brahmaputra Board/Ministry

of Water Resources. NEC is requested to help funding some of the projects that are regional in nature.

**4<sup>th</sup> SECTORAL SUMMIT ON TOURISM & HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY:**

Since the Perspective Plan is being prepared by the NEC through a Consultant, the State Government has provided the required inputs to the NEC.

**5<sup>th</sup> SECTORAL SUMMIT ON AIR CONNECTIVITY:**

The State Government has provided the necessary security requirement for the Baljek Airport. Further action on both the Umroi Airport expansion & the Baljek Airport is required to be taken up by the Airport Authority of India. The AAI has recently committed to make both the Airports functional for operation for bigger aircrafts by 2010.

**6<sup>th</sup> SECTORAL SUMMIT ON RAIL CONNECTIVITY:**

Apart from the Azara-Byrnihat and Depa-Sarangma Railway line, Meghalaya has also proposed new railway lines to connect important region within and outside the State.

## **7<sup>th</sup> SECTORAL SUMMIT ON INFORMATION**

### **TECHNOLOGY:**

The discussions dwells more on Telecommunication sector and steps to cover Meghalaya adequately by Sturdy Telecom & Mobile network and also broadband facility is envisaged by the Telecom Ministry by December, 2008.

## **8<sup>th</sup> SECTORAL SUMMIT ON EDUCATION, SPORTS**

### **AND ART & CULTURE:**

As per resolution at the meeting, Meghalaya is in the process of formulating and finalizing the Education Policy and Sports Policy which are expected to be ready soon.

### **AIR CONNECTIVITY:**

#### **Umroi Airport:**

The State has taken steps to acquire land for extension of runway & other facilities for the Airport to enable for larger Aircraft landing and service facilities. As such, it is requested that the Ministry of Civil Aviation/AAI/NEC/DONER may take

urgent steps for upgradation of Umroi Airport and to make it feasible for landing of larger Aircrafts.

**Baljek Airport:**

The Baljek Airport in Tura, West Garo Hills has been designed for take off of small aircrafts only and the State Government has taken steps to provide security for the workers from the month of January, 2007. It is requested that the Ministry of Civil Aviation/AAI/NEC/DONER take urgent steps to make the Airport functional so as to make it feasible for landing of at least ATR Aircrafts.

**INTERNATIONAL TRADE :**

The State of Meghalaya has an international border of 443 Kms. with Bangladesh. In the past, people of Meghalaya used to have very good trade relationship with the then East Bengal which was disrupted after partition. In this connection, I feel the Government of India may make every effort to ensure that Trade between Meghalaya and Bangladesh flourish once again. For this, all facilities for

clearance, etc, for traded goods should be made available within the State itself preferably at the Land Custom Stations (LCS) themselves. The LCS at Dawki, Borsora, Gasuapara, etc. should be well-equipped in all respect. Supplementary services like Banking, Post Offices, Mobile Phones etc should be made available at these LCS.

In conclusion, I hope that the various issues raised here would be deliberated carefully and will receive due attention of the North Eastern Council and concerned Ministries in the interest of development of this Region.

**THANK YOU.**

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