



**THE 56TH
NORTH EASTERN COUNCIL MEETING**

**SPEECH OF
DR. S.S. SIDHU
HIS EXCELLENCY
THE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR**

**MAY 12 & 13, 2008
AGARTALA**

Hon'ble Minister DoNER & Chairman, North Eastern Council, Shri Mani Shankar Aiyarji, Council Members and Friends,

It is my privilege to participate in the 56th Plenary meeting of the North Eastern Council. I express my appreciation to Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar, Chairman of the North Eastern Council for giving me this opportunity to address this August House to share some of my views.

I am pleased to learn that today's agenda includes adoption of two very important documents i.e. documents on "Poverty Eradication in NER" and "Vision NER-2020". These were discussed in the 55th meeting of the Council. I am sure necessary changes have been made in both the documents. I appreciate the efforts made by the Ministry of DoNER and the NEC in bringing out these documents. I am happy to note that State wise vision documents will be annexed to the "Vision NER2020" Document.

The Council will, I am sure, share my concern over the continuing state of deprivation of people in the rural and hill areas of the NE states, of people who do not have access to even basic human needs in terms of income, education, health and other basic amenities. The Council, I suggest, should resolve to eradicate poverty by 2020 and adopt clear-cut strategies to achieve the target. Based on the two documents, We expect the NEC and the M/o DoNER and the States to join hands and agree on actionable plans to accelerate the pace of development and bring the fruits of development to the remotest corner of the Region and to the most deprived.

I am glad to know that the M/o DoNER has in collaboration with the World Bank progressed considerably in preparing the North Eastern Region Livelihoods Project. The success of the IFAD assisted Livelihoods Project (NERCORMD), I am told, will be replicated and up scaled to bring the benefits to a much larger number of our people. I am sure this project for sustainable development of livelihoods will be a great success. The participatory and cluster approach is key to the successful implementation of the project. This I recommend should be further strengthened. Such innovative projects, I hope, will contribute to reduction of the poverty ratio from the 13.9% of 2004-05 (MRP) and thereby eradicate abject poverty by stimulating a sustainable pace of rapid economic development and prosperity.

This will mean that we will have less people dependant on agriculture for a living, people whose fortunes and fate are not determined by the monsoons. An increase in agricultural productions and productivity will give the much needed impetus to growth in non-farm sectors. We also need to educate our farmers on the use of modern technology, wean away tribal farmers from jhum cultivation, extend required credit to the farmers and intensify agricultural research and popularize double-triple cropping and expand investments in minor irrigation and diversify production to suit modern markets. The North East has a rich and vibrant tradition of colorful handlooms and a vast range of exquisite handicrafts. A large number of our artisans depend on this for their livelihood. To make these traditional activities remunerative, there is a dire need to improve designs which will enhance value addition and diversity production to suit modern markets.

I agree 100% with Shri Mani Shankar Aiyarji that improved and upgraded connectivity-by road-by air-by rail- and in some parts by waterways, is critical to breaking the isolation of the region and re-establishing the historical trade-links with Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan and China. The continuing crippling power shortages also deserve our focused attention to bridge the infrastructure deficit and create an environment conducive to investments, both public and private.

While building the requisite physical infrastructure, we cannot afford to ignore the other dimension, i.e., the social infrastructure in healthcare, drinking water and social welfare of women and children, particularly those living in remote hill areas. We have to consciously adopt strategies to provide greater opportunities to the poor and weaker sections to participate as equal partners, in the growth process. We need to look at the forte of each community to evolve workable delivery systems. I believe, one of them is the involvement of community based organizations in both the planning and implementation stages. We need to empower and strengthen our PRIs, the traditional Village Councils.

I endorse the suggestions made to adopt the document on "Poverty Eradication in NER".

I also agree to the adoption of the Vision NER2020 Document. I am deeply concerned that the per capita income GSDP of Manipur is lower than the average for NER and second lowest after Assam as compared to Rs 30,357 of Mizoram and Rs26,129 of Nagaland as per the Document. While adopting the documents, I propose that we keep provisions for amendments and for incorporating progressive views and suggestions as we progress and learn. The document will thus become dynamic reflecting the hopes and aspirations of our people.

All of us want to see the region catch up with the rest of the country by 2020. But the task is enormous as amply detailed in the document. It would require significant acceleration in growth rate of the NE States. An average growth rate of 12.95% of Gross State Domestic Product and per capita income average growth rate of 11.64 % would be required to catch up with the average income level in the Country by 2020. No doubt this is a formidable target as of now. The strategies may be simple; participatory development based on harnessing the natural resources of the region, capacity building to translate the high literacy rate of the region into employability in productive occupations, strengthening infrastructure and connectivity necessary for realizing the vision of peace and prosperity through participatory growth, raising resources critical to implement the development strategy and a responsive administration and good governance to create an enabling environment for conversion of dreams into reality. We have to put the process in place expeditiously.

I would also like to briefly touch upon the NEC's Annual Plan, 2008-09 and the proposed tourism incentives package for LTC and other domestic tourists.

A. P. 2008-09

I understand that we are here to approve the revised budget based on the allocation of Rs.624.00 crores for NEC's Annual Plan, 2008-09 as against the Council's proposal of Rs.1200 crores. I presume the priority list of projects

submitted by the States has been given due consideration. I appreciate that priority continues to be accorded to the transportation and Power Transmission sectors. This should be so. We have also given equal priority to these sectors while submitting our list of prioritized projects to the NEC.

I am informed that two roads; namely "Upgradation of Tamenglong-Tamei Road" and the "Thanlon- Sinzawl Road" have been shortlisted for upgradation during the 11th Plan. We have requested the NEC to consider the TamenglongKangpokpi Road together with the Tamenglong Tamei Road. This will provide alternative connectivity to the backward Tamenglong district to NH-39 and thus enhance interstate connectivity.

In the Power Sector, we have submitted proposals for construction of 132 KV sub-station 2nd circuit S/C lines from Yaingangpokpi to Kakching and 2nd D/C lines from Kakching to Churachandpur. These projects may deserve to be included in the NEC's Annual Plan, 2008-09 for improving the regional grid connectivity.

I am happy that the NEC has extended the pilot project for double cropping to Manipur during 2007-08. The NEC should in all fairness, continue to support the Regional Potato Breeder Farm at Mao in Manipur. It is progressing well and requires further support to expand the area of cultivation and cater to the needs of the people of both Manipur and Nagaland.

I appreciate the efforts made by Shri P.P. Srivastav, Hon'ble Member, NEC on skill upgradation of teachers as a follow up to the Sectoral Summit on Education. I am told that that assessment number of teachers requiring training has been made only in respect of primary school teachers for Manipur. Training is equally, and perhaps more important for teachers at secondary and higher secondary levels. This may kindly be taken into account. The existing machinery for training of teachers may be factored-in for better coverage and optimization of resources. Let us not try and re-invent the wheel.

One area of continued concern is the time taken to process and sanction projects, this applies to both NEC and M/oDoNER. Largely due to this, there is time and cost over-run. And M/o DoNER does not entertain any cost escalation. I understand that one of the reasons is the delay in getting technoeconomic appraisal, clearance from the line Ministries, I would like to suggest the M/o DoNER may also adopt the methodology being successfully followed for appraisal of PMGSY projects. It will substantially reduce the time lag and help M/o DoNER to utilize NLCPR funds expeditiously. Alternatively, the M/o DoNER may periodically organize joint appraisal meetings with officials of the line Ministries and the State Governments to clear projects on the spot. The Ministry of DoNER should increase budgetary allocations for capacity building programmes for officials of the NE States and for upgradation of their skills. The Ministry of DoNER may also consider providing funds for preparation of DPRs for retained projects under NLCPR as done by the NEC. Another sore point between the States and M/o DoNER is the denial of agency charges while approving NLCPR projects. I suggest that M/o DoNER adopt the NEC pattern in respect of agency charges for projects not executed departmentally.

Tourism Incentives package for LTC and other domestic tourists: I am happy that Statewise tourism incentives packages for LTC and other domestic tourists have been identified. I have often emphasised the need for development of tourism in the North Eastern Region which will have a ripple effect on employment and income generation. I hope that some of the good tourist circuits of the Manipur are also included in the Annual Plan 2008-09 proposals. I would like to emphasis here that all North East States be included in these packages.

I have stressed more than once the importance of developing Moreh on the Manipur-Myanmar border as the gateway for trade with Myanmar and other South East Asian countries. I am encouraged by the new developments like resumption of bus/train services between India and Bangladesh and ongoing negotiations for developing trade with Bangladesh and infrastructure development for the identified ICPs. We should broaden our channels of communication with Thailand, Malayasia, Singapore and Indonesia.

I am confident that under your able Chairmanship the LOOK EAST Policy will address the concerns of the NER. The move to open a Branch Secretariat of the MEA in Guwahati is a move in this direction. We welcome this development and congratulate you for making this happen. Re-opening of the historical trade links will, I am sure enrich the quality of life by expanding choices.

I thank the Chairman and the NEC Secretariat for giving me this opportunity to share my views once again.

JAI HIND