

Respected Prime Minister, Hon'ble Dy Chairman, Planning Commission, Hon'ble Union Ministers, esteemed Members, distinguished Invitees and Friends.

I am privileged to participate in this meeting of the 53rd National Development Council which has been convened to discuss exclusively Agriculture and Food issues. I also wish to compliment Hon'ble Prime Minister for constitution of an NDC Sub-Committee on Agriculture and Related issues under the Chairmanship of Shri Sharad Pawar, the Union Minister of Agriculture with a view to examine the problems facing Indian Agriculture and to suggest implementable action plans in view of the seriousness of the situation.

2. I am really grateful to Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission for bringing out a well drafted document on "food and agriculture". I am sure, the deliberation of this meeting will go a long way in evolving a concrete policy and give direction to addressing the problems of agriculture facing the nation today.

3. At the outset, I would like to state that my Government support the recommendations made in the report of Sub-Committee of National Development Council on Agriculture and related issues. The recommendations are quite exhaustive and in some cases would result in a much needed reformed of the agricultural sector so that the targeted growth rate of 4.1% can be achieved and resultantly is a broad-based and inclusive growth of 9.0 % for the 11th Five Year Plan be exceeded.

4. The agriculture sector has many problems. Its growth rate was less than 2% in the last decade. Yield growth has also declined. Farmers suicide have continued in some states. Farming is becoming a non-viable activity. Further, scope for increase in net sown area is limited. Land degradation in the form of depletion of soil fertility, erosion and water logging has increased. There has been a decline in the surface irrigation expansion rate and a fall in the ground water level. Disparities in productivity across regions and crops have persisted.

5. The challenges for achieving 4.1% growth and equity in agriculture is the removal of constraints on both the supply and demand side. The support system have to be tuned to improve productivity and incomes of farmers with emphasis on small and marginal farmers and dry land areas.

6. While framing agriculture policy, it should be gender sensitive too since the share of women is increasing. Cost reduction in agriculture is important to compete in the globalised world. I also feel horticulture and allied activities like dairying, poultry and fisheries have to grow at the rate 6 to 7% to achieve 4.1% growth in agriculture.

7. If we want inclusive growth, both Central and State Governments have to focus more on the agriculture sector. The determination of UPA Government at the centre on reversing the declining trend in the growth rate of agriculture and infrastructure sector through a focus intervention of Bharat Nirman is surely a positive step in this direction. It is gratifying to note that Central Government is introducing an innovative scheme called

“Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana” where additional funds would be available to the State Government for the scheme based on twin formulae.

8. With this general observation, I would like to seek the indulgence of this Council to a few basic issues, which are of special significance to Manipur

9. Manipur is a small State with an area of 22,327 sq km and population of about 23.45 lakhs. While on the one hand, Manipur State as a whole lags behind other States in terms of economic development, on the other hand, within Manipur itself, there is large disparity in development among different states. The development of road-network, electricity supply system, banking facilities, telecommunication facilities, etc are much below the national average. Some of the peculiar problems of the region include jhoom cultivation, high cost of transportation of construction materials, lack of banking facilities, etc.

10. Manipur, once a surplus State, is now deficit in production of rice which is the staple food of the people. This is due to the fact that the State's agriculture depends on seasonal rainfall. As there is inadequate irrigation, multiple cropping programme could not be taken up satisfactorily even in the valley districts, where most of the agriculture activities are concentrated. Out of net sown area of 225.78 thousand hectares, (2006-07) irrigation coverage was only 12.02% of the net area. The output of foodgrains was only 480 thousand tones against the requirement of 609.80 thousand tones in 2007-08. Besides the gap in irrigation infrastructure, the other main constraints faced by the State are inadequate farm mechanization, inadequate research facilities for production of location specific quality seeds, non availability of fertilizers, lack of regulated market system, credit facilities, etc. Influenced by the above constraints, the level of production of rice per ha. was only 1994 kg. The level of fertilizer consumption was 75.0 kg/ha.

11. The State is predominantly an agrarian economy and irrigation plays an important role in sustaining its growth. In order to ensure optimal utilization of over exploited water reserves, the strategy of my Government is to complete the three major and medium irrigation projects namely, Thoubal, Khuga and Dolaithabi. The State has so far been practicing mono cropping under the rain fed condition. Only after the introduction of high yielding variety of seeds, the necessity of assured irrigation is felt by the farmers. As such the multiple cropping programme during the rabi and pre kharif is highly essential. The State has been trying to discourage the practice of non productive system of shifting cultivation by permanent wet cultivation by constructing terraced cultivation under assured irrigation. Accordingly, providing of irrigation facility during the pre and post monsoon by conserving water of the rainy season to iron out inter seasonal fluctuation is highly essential for rabi and pre-kharif crops.

12. The performance of major and medium irrigation is very poor. The target of creating 57.22 thousand Ha of irrigation potential (cumulative) during Tenth Plan could not be achieved. The improvement in cropping intensity has been marginal at around 130.97% during 2006-07.

13. The optimization of existing irrigation capacity utilization through renovation and modernization of irrigation projects, expansion of irrigation facilities, effective harnessing water is of paramount importance. There should be effective management of large water bodies like the Loktak Lake in Manipur, which sustains not only the Loktak Hydro Electric Project and a large population of fishermen but also provides sanctuary to some rare species of wild life. Minor and micro-irrigation systems are ideal largely for the hilly areas in the State. Special Central funding for completion of the ongoing major and medium irrigation projects are crucial for their timely completion and for optimizing use of the water resources.

14. At present agriculture in the State is lacking diversification and commercialization. Taking into account the prevailing agro-climatic condition in the State, agriculture can be diversified in the form of horticulture crops, plantation crops, paddy-cum pisciculture, agriculture-cum livestock production, production-cum processing, etc. Such activities can be activated for increasing the income of the rural population household. In a State like Manipur where 5.3% of the net agricultural area is confined to the hill areas, crop diversification in horticultural crops has a long way to go. For example the passion fruit in Senapati District and giant chilli, orange in Tamenglong district, kachai lime in Ukhrul District and tea in Jiribam are some of the glaring avenues for crop diversification in the State.

15. In order to strengthen the Transfer of Technology (ToT) to the farmers, the Agricultural Extension system in the State may be reorganized as per the T & V System. The extension functionaries of the Department needs to get the new technology for increasing agricultural production and productivity. It is felt necessary to establish a Agricultural Extension Training Centre (AETC) of the State since there is no such Extension Training Centre besides the recommendations of the Strengthening of Transfer of Technology measures. The Seed Replacement Rate (SRR) of all the major crops is very low. The SRR of the rice is 0.28% during the year 2006-07. To increase the Seed Replacement Rate for all crops particularly cereals, pulses and oilseeds, there is a need to have minikit Demonstration Programme in the State.

16. There is also no Seed Certification Agency/Seed Corporation in the State. It is necessary to establish a Seed Certification Agency/State Seed Corporation for successful quality seed production and distribution programme. Section 7 of the Seeds Acts, 1966 (54 of 66) provides establishment of Seed Certification Agencies in each State and establishment of such Agency/State Seed Corporation would strengthen the Seed Village Programme, Seed banks and distribution of certified/quality seeds.

17. There are 3(three) Soil Testing Laboratories in the State providing service to the farmers. Due to terrain and lack of better communication facilities in the State, the farmers from the far places can not get the advantage of the soil testing. The establishment of Soil Testing Laboratories for each districts of the State is the need of the hour for maintaining soil fertility and to enhance Fertilizer Use Efficiency.

18. Farm mechanization is becoming the only means for increasing agricultural production and productivity per unit. Efficient farm mechanisation can be achieved only when proper application of improved/suitable farm machineries and implements are being made available timely to the farmers. On the other hand, the farmers can not afford the very high price of the improved farm equipments in their own. It needs to provide 50% subsidy for major equipments so that the farmers can afford it. In addition to this, it is also needed to establish a Farm Machinery Training Centre since the machinery and equipments are very technical to farmers.

19. Poultry and Piggery forms an important segment for agriculture sector in the State. The contribution of poultry and piggery to this sector is of great immense. The development of this sector will enhance the socio economic development of the people of this state. Majority of the people depend on this sector for their livelihood. However, due to lack of proper infrastructure, they are not fully developed to the extent possible inspite of great potential. Out of total 23 thousand tones meat production of the state, about 31 to 32 percent are annually contributed from pig which may be the same for all NE State. It is considered necessary for the introduction of piggery and poultry project for NE States in the line of ongoing National Project for Cattle & Buffalo Breeding.

20. The State Government has been implementing mostly the surface flow and surface lift schemes depending on the topography and availability of water sources. These schemes give benefit to the marginal farmers as well as the small farms upto 2000 ha. These schemes are easy to be constructed and less time consuming. Water User's Association are entrusted with the operation and maintenance to address the sustainability aspect. Apart from this, the State Government is venturing to implement restoration and renovation of water bodies. These water bodies are directly linked to agriculture, fishing and domestic needs of the people and help in maintaining environment and ecology balance.

21. The transportation of foodgrains and other essential commodities to the State is mainly through the long terrain of NH-39 passing through the State of Nagaland. It is well known fact that the law and order situation in the North Eastern States has been affected by the movement of various insurgent groups and further aggravated by frequent occurrence of land slides leading to total blockade of roads for days, ethnic bunds, strikes and illegal taxes collected at Dimapur abnormally casting shadow on the prices of essential commodities and other goods and commodities.

22. The construction of FCI godown at Jiribam has been completed sometimes ago but FCI has not yet started stocking of foodgrains till date. If the FCI starts stocking of foodgrains at Jiribam Depot, foodgrains and essential commodities can be transported through NH-53 Jiribam-Imphal roads. It will curtail the problems faced by the State along Dimapur-Imphal roads.

23. Jiribam is the only MG Rail Terminal in Manipur to induct foodgrains and other essential commodities. It is therefore necessary to restore the placement of foodgrains

wagons at Jiribam so that the stock of foodgrains can be inducted by rail in addition to road movement from Dimapur to Imphal which has been disrupted by various factors.

24. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) which aims at providing wage-employment and employment opportunities to the youths and agricultural workers is approved only for Tamenlong district for the year 2006-07 and started implementation from April, 2006. The implementation of the scheme gives a boost to the agricultural labourers in enhancing their income and purchasing power. The progress of implementation of the scheme in the district is very good. For the year 2007-08, only two more hill districts namely, Chandel and Churachandpur District are included. Considering the impact of the implementation of the scheme in the Tamenglong District, all the district in the State may be covered under this scheme.

25. With above observations, I thank you for giving me a patient hearing. It is hoped that the deliberations of this august Council would result in larger gains and would also address the problems of agriculture and related issues of the entire country.

Thank You.