

**Hon'ble Union Minister DoNER and Chairman, NEC, Shri Paban Singh Ghatowar, Excellencies the Governor, Hon'ble Chief Minister, Members of the NEC, Officers of the Government of India and of the North Eastern States.**

This is the first occasion for me to attend a plenary of the North Eastern Council and I express my great pleasure and pride in being a part of this conclave of visionary leaders who play a crucial role in determining the course of development of the North Eastern region of India.

This Plenary is a great opportunity for all the NE States to come together and to introspect on the development initiatives undertaken in each State and in the region. More importantly, it is a forum where the meeting of minds will aid in formulating better strategies to address the socio-economic needs of the region and help propel it to greater growth and progress.

## **POWER**

Meghalaya is home to the wettest place on earth and receives an average annual rainfall in the range of 2400mm – 1200 mm in different regions of the state. This along with the terrain gives immense potential to the State for hydel power generation. The other NE States also have huge potential for power generation. In order to tap the potential available in the region, the Planning Commission and the Power Ministry are requested to come up with a 'Comprehensive plan for the development of power in the North Eastern Region' as this will address the shortage of power and will also contribute to the nation's future power demand.

## **ROADS & BRIDGES**

Connectivity is the lifeline for development. The Government of Meghalaya therefore continues to give very high priority to the construction of roads and bridges in the State. An important component of this exercise is the conversion of existing timber bridges into RCC permanent bridges. 25 (twenty five) existing timber and weak bridges are proposed to be taken up under 12<sup>th</sup> Plan of NEC programme at an estimated cost of Rs. 6830.70. The State PWD is preparing the DPRs which will be sent to NEC shortly. Further, there are 11 (eleven) road projects amounting to Rs. 800.00 crores and covering a total length of 383.02 kKms. Identified in the Working Group Report for the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan of NEC (2012-2017) that are awaiting formal approval from NEC.

The DPRs sanctioned during the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan and before were provided with 20 mm thick Open Graded Premixed Carpeting (OGPC) only. It has been observed that provision of 20 mm thick OGPC does not last more than 2-3 years. Being very porous, rain water easily percolates to the base and sub-base courses in spite of provision of 6 mm seal coat which is again porous in nature. As such, Meghalaya, being a very high rainfall area, may be allowed to prepare DPRs with higher specification of bituminous courses like Bituminous Macadam (B.M.) and Semi-Dense Bituminous Carpeting (SDBC).

## **RAIL CONNECTIVITY**

In terms of rail connectivity, the Byrnihat – Shillong Railway project is yet to achieve its desired goal. Survey for the land alignment for the Tetelia-Byrnihat project has since been completed. There is, however, some opposition from a few local NGOs to the project. The State Government is addressing this issue.

Meghalaya shares a 443 km international border with Bangladesh and access to Bangladesh through Chittagong port is vital for the growth of trade and commerce in the North Eastern States. The Chairman NSAB during his visit to Shillong had said that this matter would be taken with the Railway Ministry. The NEC is therefore requested to expedite the matter with the M/o of Railways.

### **AIR CONNECTIVITY**

The resumption of air services between Umroi and Kolkata from 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013 is a welcome step. The upgradation of Umroi airport to handle larger aircrafts is, however, encountering certain hurdles. There is an additional requirement of land which requires the consent of the Ministry of Defence. Installation of ILS is another issue which requires the approval of DGCA. Operationalisation of the Baljek airport also needs to be attended on priority. The NEC is requested to pursue these issues with the concerned Central Ministries. To ensure better air connectivity the flight from Kolkata to Shillong may be extended to Guwahati and back to facilitate better linkage to Delhi.

### **TELECOMMUNICATION**

In this technology driven age, it is rather lamentable that the State displays a grim picture as far as telecom connectivity is concerned. There were many cases of dark spots throughout the State and frequent failure of connectivity even in the Shillong – Guwahati Highway. Likewise broadband connectivity remains unsatisfactory. Even some of the District Head Quarters are not yet connected through this service. The slow progress in the provisioning of Broadband services in many places in the State is hampering the overall progress of the state in terms of day – to- day transaction including development related activities such as tele-medicine

programmes, long distance learning, virtual class rooms, I.T. Centres in rural areas on the pattern of e-choupals etc.

### **INTER-STATE BORDER DISPUTE**

The inter-state border dispute is a very long pending issue which has caused immense suffering to the people living in the interstate border of the North Eastern Region such as Meghalaya and Assam, Nagaland and Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam & Mizoram and Assam. The State Government of Meghalaya is of the opinion that the Centre should set up a Boundary Commission in order to resolve this long unwanted pending issue. The Government of India through the North Eastern Council can play a very vital role in bringing about harmony and understanding amongst the people living in the border area by early resolution of this long festering issue. This would facilitate inter-State commerce and other activities by the concerned State Governments. The NEC is requested to take up the matter with the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India to expedite the setting up of the Boundary Commission and to settle all the inter-state boundary disputes once and for all.

### **INTERNATIONAL BORDER TRADE**

As has been stated earlier, Meghalaya shares a long international border with Bangladesh. There is a need therefore to equip the LCS at Dawki, Borsora, Gasuapara etc. in all respects. Supplementary services like Banking (ATM facilities), Post Offices and mobile phone networks should be improved immediately and with utmost priority at these LCS.

Two border haats have been reopened recently along the Indo-Bangladesh border in the Meghalaya sector. The Kalaichar –

Baliamari haat under West Garo Hills District was reopened by the Hon'ble Union Minister of Commerce & Industries and his Bangladesh counterpart in July 2011. A similar haat was also reopened between Lauwaghar or Dalora (Sunamganj District of Bangladesh) and Balat ( East Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya) on 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2012.

Strengthening of the Indo-Bangla Trade Relations would ultimately benefit the entire region in a multi faceted manner. The Council is requested to take initiative to extend the requisite facilities at the LCA most expeditiously.

### **VETERINARY POLYCLINIC**

The setting up of Veterinary Polyclinic in Meghalaya to provide wide range of veterinary care services is long overdue. The objectives are to check the various diseases, meat quality etc. The Government of Meghalaya had proposed the "Establishment of Veterinary Polyclinic in Meghalaya" during 2012-13 for funding by the NEC. However, in-principle approval is yet to be accorded by the NEC Secretariat.

### **TOURISM**

Meghalaya with its dazzling vistas holds immense potential in the tourism sector. With a holistic view to develop the tourism in the region, Tata Consultancy Services has prepared the Regional Tourism Master plan. Guwahati-Tura-Balpakram-Tura-Manas-Guwahati has been identified as one of the tourism circuits in the State. Wayside amenities to promote highway tourism are urgently required to actualize the plan into ground reality. The aim of the State Tourism Mission is to increase the tourist inflow by encouraging both domestic and foreign tourists to come, visit &

enjoy the beauty of the State and experience its salubrious climate. The State Government is endeavouring to project Meghalaya as among the most preferred Tourist Destinations within the country and abroad. Tourism and Hospitality include tourism activities for leisure; for cultural, religious or business purposes and providing suitable accommodation, food and beverage services to customers. The core inspiration for this Tourism Mission is that the State has the potential to attract tourists of different interests and our stakeholders have the capacity to provide hospitality services comparable to the best in the region. To achieve the goals of the Mission, assistance from NEC is necessary in terms of infrastructure, capacity building and publicity.

## **ARTS & CULTURE**

Like all the North-eastern states, Meghalaya too is a State with a rich cultural heritage. During the 61<sup>st</sup> NEC plenary Session of the NEC, the Hon'ble Chairman of the NEC mooted the idea of undertaking an exercise of organizing North East Cultural Festival every year. He had informed the august house that the Ministry of DoNER is planning to hold such a festival every year, showcasing the cultural heritage of the North Eastern Region in the National capital for the people to appreciate the same. The Government of Meghalaya welcomes this idea which will integrate the cultural identities of the North East in one platform for showcasing to the country and the world. Such events, to have the desired results, will entail a fair amount of expenditure for which funds may be allotted by the NEC.

## **REGIONAL INSTITUTE OF ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES**

Of late, the subject matter relating to ecology and environment has assumed enormous significance in view of the Climate Change

issues affecting the world which impacts the North East India as well. We may now have to cope with unexpected natural disasters and catastrophes that have never been experienced before as had happened in Uttarakhand recently. The 57<sup>th</sup> Council Meeting had, in principle, accepted the State Government's proposal for the setting up of the Regional Institute of Environmental Studies (RIES) at Shillong. However, in view of resource constraint faced by the NEC, the State Government has requested the Ministry of Environment & Forests to consider the setting up of this Institute. The NEC and the Ministry of DoNER is requested to extend its assistance to the State by pursuing the matter with the Ministry of Environment & Forests for early approval of the proposal.

### **SCHOOL OF PLANNING & ARCHITECTURE**

Although Shillong is considered as the Centre of Education for the North East, it is unfortunate that the State does not have an Engineering College. As a result scores of students from our State go out every year to study engineering and technology in institutions outside the State. The setting up of the School of Planning and Architecture in Shillong has been a long felt need of the State and the North Eastern Region. With its establishment, architects and town planners would graduate, who can serve the entire North Eastern Region. It is pertinent to mention that design of earthquake proof buildings is very essential in this region due to its location in one of the most sensitive seismic zones in the world. The School of Planning and Architecture, Shillong is proposed to be set up in the pattern of the SPA, New Delhi and is designed to be:

- The first autonomous planning institution ever set up in the NER under the Ministry of HRD, GOI.

- An institute of Excellence with all degree, master degree and doctoral courses being taught at SPA, New Delhi.
- The Centre of Excellence to offer short-term and long-term training programmes such as Diploma, P.G. Diploma courses in planning etc. for the officers of the NER State Governments.
- An Institute of Excellence for Planning and Human Settlement Management in the NER.
- The Regional Centre for Planning and Consultancy services.
- The Library of Excellence for all books, journals, mimeographs, magazines relating to planning and architecture.

The NEC is requested to actively pursue the matter with the MoHRD in the interest of the North Eastern Region.

### **DISASTER MANAGEMENT**

Apart from several other measures that need to be taken towards preparation for disaster management it is desirable to conduct and intensive survey of Government buildings, in the first instance, so as to assess the requirements of retrofitting, if any in view of the entire State of Meghalaya being in the high seismic zone. The NEC should, in fact, consider taking up this exercise in all the NE States.

### **SPORTS**

The youth of North East including Meghalaya have aptitude and talent for sports and games which need to be nurtured in the interest of regional as well as national integration. In order to do this, special attention needs to be given to create adequate sports infrastructure in all the districts of the State. The Government of Meghalaya has recently forwarded proposals for creation of sports



infrastructure in the State estimated at Rs. 36.23 crores for funding by the NEC. These projects need to be taken up on priority by the NEC.

**CONCLUSION:**

Before concluding, I place on record my gratitude to the Chairman of NEC for giving me this opportunity to place these observations concerning my State.

Since its inception, the NEC has played a crucial role in harnessing the potential of the North-Eastern States and I hope that it will continue to shoulder its responsibility with vision and vigour in the years to come. Thank you.

JAI HIND