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Text of the Speech

By

His Excellency Lt. General (Retd.) Bhopinder Singh

PVSM, AVSM

Lieutenant Governor, Andaman & Nicobar Islands

**Meeting of the
National Development Council**

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ANDAMAN NICOBAR ADMINISTRATION

Speech of
Lt. General (Retd.) Bhopinder Singh, PVSM, AVSM
His Excellency Lt. Governor of A&N Islands

At the 54th Meeting of
National Development Council (NDC)
on 19th December, 2007.

Hon'ble Prime Minister, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission, Chief Ministers and Members of the National Development Council and ladies and gentlemen.

I am grateful for the opportunity given to me to present before this august body the views of my Administration on its developmental plans and priorities in the Eleventh Plan.

Hon'ble Prime Minister, Sir! We last met on 29th May 2007 and discussed problems and issues related to food and agriculture. The Approach Paper to the 11th Plan was discussed in the 52nd meeting of the NDC on 9th December, 2006 and were directed to prepare the Plan on the basis of direction given in the Approach Paper for faster and more inclusive growth.

Our vision for Andaman and Nicobar Islands is that it should be a mini profile of an empowered India. The empowerment should be based on the progressive principles of sovereignty, dignity of life, solidarity of its inhabitants and equality in distribution of the administrative, social and natural wealth and resources of the island to its people. The vision itself encapsulates the lofty concept of "India", and our islands are replete with the rich and proud saga of

our freedom struggle. With this vision in mind and given the constraints peculiar to our islands, in the 11th Plan, my Administration has set the target of overall growth rate at 5.4 percent. The programmes and proposals of my Administration are already with the Planning Commission. About 45% of our total outlay is projected for transport sector and 30% for Social Services Sector. Given the geographical remoteness of the islands from the mainland proper means of transportation both to mainland and internally within the islands is critical. So, there is great emphasis in improving shipping, roads, bridges, ports and related infrastructure. Other priority sectors for my Administration are General Services and Rural Development. In the Social Services highest priority is given to Education, water supply and sanitation, housing and health. Our performance in terms of human development indicators such as Infant Mortality Rate, Maternal Mortality Rate, Total Fertility Rate, Malnutrition of children, Sex ratio, dropout rate in Elementary Education, Literacy rate, Gender gap in literacy etc. is much better compared to that at National level. The Approach Paper to the Eleventh Plan emphasises setting of specific targets for performance during the Plan period. Accordingly, my Administration has set key monitorable targets for Education, Health, Agriculture, Industries, Services etc. In this context I would like to highlight some important issues which have a direct bearing on the perspective planning for our islands.

The strategic location of our Islands and the consequent security imperatives in the context of an emerging Asia-Centric world scenario need no emphasis. Our proximity to other countries in the region in a way makes us vulnerable. With Coco Islands of Myanmar at only 45 Kms from the northernmost part of our Islands and Indonesia at about 150 Kms from southernmost Island, we

remain exposed to economic exploitation by foreign poachers of marine life and forests products. Our response has been constrained by the fact that our policing and security agencies are inadequately equipped to keep effective and constant watch on such a long coast line throughout the year. Though the Islands have peaceful, cosmopolitan, secular population with a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and diverse cultural background, yet we cannot afford to relax our vigil. We have to keep a close eye on the developments in the region for its potential effect on the Islands. At the same time, our strategic location in the Indian Ocean leads us certain economic advantages which we should endeavor to realize to the benefit of these Islanders and the Nation.

Large scale influx of people together with normal growth rate has caused the population to increase from 30971 in 1951 to 356152 in 2001. The decennial growth rate during 1991-2001 was 26.90% as compared to All India average of 21.34%. Uncontrolled migration is leading to straining of the resources. As a measure to control migration Identity Cards have been issued by the UT Administration to 80% of the eligible population and a Draft Regulation on Entry and Residence in ANI has been sent to MHA. However, it has been suggested by MHA to consider this Regulation only after the findings of next census is available.

In Andaman & Nicobar Islands, out of the 572 islands only 38 islands are inhabited. There is acute shortage of water in Port Blair where 80% of water supply is met by Dhanikari Dam. The requirement of drinking water in urban area is 27.18 MLD as per the norms of National Building Code whereas the availability is only 17.79 MLD. Thus there is a shortfall of 9.39 MLD. Drinking

water supply requirement of each island has to be addressed separately depending upon its geography and demography. Drinking water projects whether under implementation or at the stage of conceptualization will have to be completed in the 11th Plan in order to tide over this acute shortage. These are raising the height of Dhanikari Dam, setting up of desalination plant, transportation of water from Rutland Island by laying submarine pipeline and creation of reservoir/storage facilities at various locations.

When we plan for my Islands we have to consider that only 8 percent of land is available for developmental activities as 92 percent of the land is either reserved forest or deemed forest. The islands big and small-are separated by deep sea channels and therefore call for Islands specific plans for providing basic facilities and infrastructure. This is a challenging task before my Administration with inadequate Administrative Machinery. Further, most of the projects require clearance from the Ministry of Environment and Forests and they would need a expeditious balanced view which harmonizes developmental goals with environmental concerns.

The per capita income in agriculture and allied activities is fairly low. This is a reflection of low levels of productivity, limited value addition, poor storage, transport & marketing infrastructure. Therefore, multi-pronged strategy with a focus on high value agriculture, hub-and-spoke marketing structure, setting up of Rural Knowledge Centres, needs to be evolved to address some of the main reasons for low-income generation in Agriculture. Similarly, in the Fisheries sector we have good potential to generate high income and employment if we promote tuna fishing. Out of the estimated 1.48 lakh tonnes of Annual Fishery potential, about 64,500 tonnes

constitute tuna i.e. 44% of the total fishery potential. Some of the initiatives already underway are: creation of one Fishing Harbour of International standard, 850 ha of tsunami submerged land identified for shrimp culture, Marine Products Export Development Authority, Kochi is preparing a project report for development of fishery infrastructure in the Islands. Plans are also afoot for creation of more Fish Landing Centres, introduction of bigger and modern vessels to exploit oceanic tuna processing and exporting facilities from Port Blair to neighbouring countries and setting up of cold storage facilities.

Shipping and Civil Aviation facilities are crucial for the development of the islands. Under the present system, on an average it takes 8 years to acquire a mainland-island shipping vessel. At every stage, such as finalization of design specification, appointment of consultants, finalization of tender documents, finalization of tender bids and award of contract etc. proposals are required to be submitted to Govt. of India for approval. There is a need to streamline the procedure for acquisition of modern means of transport, to increase the financial power of the Administrator and for greater involvement of the private sector in providing these facilities. The dockyards need modernization to take up repair of ships and vessels. This will result in saving the wasteful expenditure, besides generating job opportunities for the unemployed youth of these Islands. Besides Port Blair, we also propose to build modern ports at Kamorta, Katchal and Great Nicobar Islands. I would like to bring to the kind notice of the Hon'ble Prime Minister that two aircrafts and two helicopters projected in the Annual Plan 2006-07 are yet to be procured by the Ministry of Civil Aviation. These aircrafts are needed immediately to meet the minimum requirement of the islanders for emergent

movement of men and materials.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands are yet to tap the tourism potential in any meaningful manner. The turquoise blue sea, talc-like beaches and the sheer richness of tropical fauna and flora, complemented by a strong history and multi-ethnic and cultural diversity, are all the ingredients of a booming industry. We are framing policies to develop adequate infrastructure that would facilitate the realizing of the potential. We have prepared projects on a public private partnership model and are deliberating on the risk-reward matrix. After working out the risk and reward sharing between Government and private sector we would be able to do some justice to the immense tourism potential of our islands. The principal challenge before us is connectivity and the commensurate infrastructure to facilitate faster, direct and regular accessibility. More frequent direct flights from metro cities in the mainland, introduction of international flights, laying of optical fibre cable between Chennai and Singapore through Port Blair, promotion of high quality hotels, resorts and faster inter-island air and sea transportation facilities are the key areas requiring urgent attention.

Under the road transport sector the private sector was playing a vital role but trends have now changed due to low return in this sector. In order to cope up the situation, my Administration has provisioned augmentation of existing fleet and supportive infrastructure.

Existing health infrastructure is absolutely inadequate and there is an acute shortage of doctors particularly the specialists. In the absence of private health facilities, the entire population of the islands is solely dependent on the Government health infrastructure.

Evacuating serious patients to the mainland is a regular feature which is not only expensive but also creates a sense of insecurity and despondency amongst the people. Establishment of Super Specialty Hospital and upgradation with modernisation of existing hospitals at Mayabunder and Car Nicobar need to be urgently taken up. To improve the health indicators there is a need to improve Doctor Population ratio and nurses doctor ratio. A & N Administration has taken some emergent steps for recruiting doctors on contract basis from mainland under UT Rural Health Mission.

Lack of facilities for professional courses in Medicine and Engineering is another concern which my Administration is earnestly trying to address. An expert committee has recommended an Engineering college with an intake of 30 students each in Electronics and Computer Engineering and a 50 seat Medical college with 300 bed hospital at Port Blair as per the norms and guidelines of Medical Council of India. Our Administration is earnestly looking at this vital social sector issue.

The demand for power is increasing rapidly in the islands. Our reliance is on diesel generators. Alternate energy generation methods do not meet the energy needs of the Islands. We need to augment our existing capacity.

Communication infrastructure is being met by the efforts of the Administration and those of ISRO, NIC and BSNL. In the 11th Plan we will have a State Wide Area Network, OFC network across northern islands and will also tap sub-marine cable sources from Chennai to Singapore and this will help in security as well as disaster

management in the islands. My Administration also requires Broadband connectivity to every School, Health Centre and Gram Panchayats.

We envisage the islands as a shining outpost for India, making it a model and inspiration for the rest of the country and the very idea of India itself peaceful, progressive and integral, and development led with the celebration of the pluralistic, rich diversity which exists on the islands.

In the end, I would like to thank Hon'ble Prime Minister and the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission for affording me this opportunity to place the views of my Administration before this highest decision making body.

JAI HIND