

Speech

By

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National Development Council**

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ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ADMINISTRATION

Respected Prime Minister, Hon'ble Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, Hon'ble Chief Ministers, Members of the National Development Council, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is indeed my privilege to address this meeting of the National Development Council. Sir, you may kindly recall that I had forwarded to you a summary of the objectives achieved by our Administration in the XI Five Year Plan and our goals and targets for the XII Five Year Plan, and it is with the utmost humility that I take this opportunity to place before you some of the major achievements and proposals of our Administration.

2. I would like to assure you that the Andaman & Nicobar Islands shall be amongst the first States and UTs to implement the scheme of Direct Transfer of Cash Subsidy of Targeted Public Distribution System. I am pleased to inform that we have already digitized the ration card holders' data base and hosted it on the Island's portal, and we are committed to launch this scheme. There are 1.04 lakh ration card holders who will be benefited, and the whole population of these Islands will be covered in a phased manner. Preparatory arrangements have been made for implementing the scheme and the process of mapping the bank account details of the ration card holders has been started. All the residents have been requested to open a bank account in any of the banks and arrangements have been made at the Fair Price Shop level to receive the bank details, and also to collect the bank account opening forms. All the banks are extending assistance for no-frill accounts, and our Administration is coordinating with them to work out the modalities for cash transfer to the beneficiaries.

3. Under MGNREGA 42,304 job cards have been issued and 22.57 lakh mandays were generated, out of which 30% were generated by women and 8.30% by STs. 1,435 assets were created at an expenditure of Rs. 4,575 lakhs. Further, 1,770 houses were constructed under the Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY).

4. We have also launched a Help Desk - "Prashasan Aap ke Dwaar" and an online grievance mechanism for taking Government to the people. This is proving to be a great assistance in this Territory where most of the islands are quite remote. All grievances received are uploaded on the same day and forwarded to the departments concerned, which send an online acknowledgement to the person lodging the grievance within two working days. The grievances have been divided into three categories and departments have been instructed to finally dispose them within 15 days, 30 days and three months respectively. The status of the grievances is monitored by Raj Niwas at the click of a button.

5. Respected Pradhan Mantriji, the key to our vision is "inclusive growth" and this is most relevant to these far flung islands. Our efforts are aimed at building infrastructure and developing the necessary skills that would attract investment and lead to the creation of jobs and equitable income generation among our people. The protection of our physical environment limits our investment choices, but imaginatively used, it can be a source of sustainable economic growth. Our focus is therefore on the development of sectors such as organic horticulture, deep-sea fishing, eco-tourism, cruises and water sports including deep-sea diving, and projects that could best take advantage of our location just off the main shipping routes.

6. Our continued investment in the development of human resources has given us an added advantage to move into a new phase of economic development, as our focus shifts to the qualitative improvement of the education sector in general, including

technical education and towards skill development in particular. Our Skill Development Mission launched in 2008 has 35 vocational courses relevant to the islands and geared towards employment generation especially in the IT Sector, repairing and manufacturing, tourism and all aspects of hospitality. It is heartening to know that most of our vocational training providers are from the non-government sector with participants required to pay a part of the fees which is reimbursed to them only on successful completion of the course. These features have led to these courses being both popular and acceptable to the market. Since our primary aim is to achieve inclusive growth for everyone, it is therefore essential that avenues of employment are available, particularly for all our young people.

7. Our PRI system is robust and functioning well and the Islands have a unique system, whereby unemployed young people are encouraged to form themselves into cooperatives at the village level and minor works are awarded to them by the Panchayats, thus ensuring employment. Further, my Administration is working to converge the activities of the Departments of Animal Husbandry, Agriculture, Fisheries and Horticulture with these cooperatives and we hope to revitalize and energize the villages and encourage the young people to take up farming, cultivation of fishes, rearing livestock and growing fruits and vegetables in their own villages. We are also identifying the requirements of the private sector in terms of the skills needed for their jobs, and matching these by providing the requisite skills to our youth so that they can find jobs more easily.

8. Our Institutes of Higher Education are focusing their efforts towards ensuring that the students are equipped to join the job market, and we have accordingly introduced new courses in our colleges. My Administration has signed an MOU with IIT Kharagpur for opening an extension centre at the Dr. BR Ambedkar Institute of Technology, Port Blair to facilitate locally employed engineers in industry and those in AICTE-approved Technical Institutes to pursue an M.Tech programme. We propose to set up an Innovation Cell in this college with the purpose of encouraging students to work and develop solutions to the challenges which these islands face. We also look forward to the establishment of a Central University in Port Blair.

9. The welfare of Particularly Vulnerable Tribals living in the Islands is one of our most important priorities. Recently, with the approval of the Central Government, the Andaman & Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribe) Regulation 1956 was amended empowering the Administrator to declare or modify the Buffer Zone around Tribal Reserve Areas, to prohibit certain commercial/tourist establishments in such Buffer Zone and to impose stringent penal provisions against those who exploit the tribes like encroaching/poaching tribal area, promoting tourism through advertisement on Aboriginal Tribe or introducing of any form of alcohol/intoxicant to the tribe. The Administration is strictly implementing the policy laid down by Central Government in the year 2004, to protect and preserve the Jarawa Tribe, through an autonomous body, namely, Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti (AAJVS). Further, on the advice of the Ministry of Tribal Welfare, this Administration has constituted a Group of Experts comprising Anthropologists and Social workers to re-look the Jarawa policy of 2004, by carrying out research studies to appreciate the perception and will of Jarawas to mainstream them, by collecting empirical data on the nutritional and health aspects of Jarawas, their movement pattern etc.

10. Enormous strides have been made in the IT Sector and the roadmap for eGovernance has been formulated. We have set up 22 Common Service Centres

called 'eDweep Kendras' which provide a one-stop facility for 41 services including payment of electricity bills, applications for ration cards, etc. During the last one year the G2C transactions from these Centres were around 3 lakhs. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands face many problems in the field of telecom connectivity due to physical isolation from the mainland. Satellites are the only mode of connectivity but this has inherent problems of time delay and speed. As a consequence, we are in the process of laying a Submarine Optical Fibre Cable which would branch off from one of the existing submarine cables connecting our mainland to South East Asia. This is a technically complex and highly advanced project and it will be the first of its kind for any State/UT in the country. It is expected that this will be installed at the earliest and the improved connectivity will undoubtedly usher in a new era of development for our islands.

11. There is enormous economic potential in the fisheries sector, even though coastal fishing is limited in our islands due to near absence of continental shelf. We are facilitating our fishermen with better and improved fishing equipment and infrastructure for storage, cold chain and fish landing centres. We are also providing support for those wishing to go into deep-sea fishing through the supply of bigger fishing trawlers, cargo transportation, packaging and marketing. Our Tuna Mission is an overarching scheme which is the vehicle for these initiatives and is aimed at increasing our existing fish catch which will go a long way in promoting sustainable economic growth of our economy.

12. Agriculture is an important activity and most of our crops are grown under rain-fed conditions. The Islands receive over 3100 mm of rains from both monsoons and in order to optimize the yield, we are giving special attention to productivity augmentation which is the key to efficient and sustainable growth in agriculture. We lay special emphasis on high-yielding variety programmes to make agriculture and horticulture commercially viable. Out of the total geographical area of 8249 Sq km, only 50,000 hectares is under cultivation, of which around half is under coconut plantation. More than 50% of the population is directly or indirectly dependent for their livelihood on some form of farm activity. In case of Nicobari tribals, nearly 90% of the population is dependent on Horticulture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries. Recognizing the importance of coconut in the lives of the tribal people of Nicobar district, and to improve the productivity of coconut, the Coconut Mission was launched by laying emphasis on value-addition of coconut products especially in promotion of Virgin Coconut Oil. This Mission is giving very good results and it has in fact already trebled the yield of coconuts per tree in our pilot project. It is therefore being extended to other parts of the district. Similarly, we are extending the benefits of organic farming to paddy and vegetable crops in a gradual manner. We have also started the certification process, which when completed, would enable our producers to get premium prices for our agricultural exports.

13. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands have achieved some incredible milestones in the face of severe constraints. Sir, you will be pleased to note that as on date, there is no child out of school, and there is no child labour at all. The Infant Mortality Rate at 19 and the Maternal Mortality Ratio at 35 are amongst the lowest in the country, and with institutional deliveries at over 98% and one hospital bed for every 330 persons, we have been able to provide sustainable and high-quality basic services to our people. The child sex ratio, which currently stands at 966, is increasing steadily every year and the Total Fertility Rate is 1.5. We have ensured one policeman

for every 85 number of persons, 100% electrification of revenue villages, and almost nil drop out from schools.

14. I am happy to inform you that my Administration has banned Gutka with effect from 1st November, 2012, and from August 2012 we have introduced airfare subsidy for those patients who are seriously ill and have to be taken on a stretcher to the mainland. We have also decided to set up a Medical College in Port Blair to provide access to quality education and to improve specialist care in these islands.

15. Sir, following the devastating Tsunami of 2004, Disaster Management is of critical importance. We have already set up a State Control Room and Six Emergency Operation Centres across our islands and are further enhancing our Emergency Warning and Communication Network. We have asked the Indian Meteorological Department to install a Doppler Weather Radar at the earliest.

16. We accord coastal security the utmost priority and we are in the process of establishing ten Marine Operational Centres (MOC) in addition to procuring large vessels. However, we would like to request the Government of India to sanction 430 posts which are essential for operating these MOCs and vessels at the earliest since the staff has to be recruited, trained and familiarized, which would take at least two years. Further, all our fishermen have been registered and will soon be issued Biometric ID cards, while the entire coastal population has been covered under NPR.

17. Waste disposal in each of the 37 inhabited islands is posing a major challenge and during the Twelfth Five Year Plan, one of our priorities will be to establish sustainable mechanisms to deal with the huge amounts of waste (particularly plastic waste) that is accumulating in all these islands. We are providing transport subsidy to the transfer of glass and plastic waste to the mainland, where it is handled. An innovative pilot project to provide a top layer on roads with shredded plastic waste has just been completed, with very positive results. We hope to extend this now to all our roads thereby providing an environmentally friendly waste disposal option for the islands.

18. We are working towards better availability of potable water and sanitation facilities in Port Blair, and throughout the islands we propose to provide potable water to all habitations having a population of more than 250 persons. Keeping in view the criticality of water requirement for the next 30 years, the Andaman and Nicobar State Water and Sanitation Mission has been entrusted with the task of preparing a Master Plan for the assessment and augmentation of water resources. This will be done in collaboration with the Central Ground Water Board and the details of sources and infrastructure will be hosted on a GIS platform. There will be a special focus on the quality of water at both the source and distribution ends. An ambitious undersea pipeline project for supply of water from the Rutland Island to Port Blair is at an advanced stage and is likely to be completed during the 12th Plan. A city-wide Sewerage Project is being planned for Port Blair.

19. However, while we have achieved a lot of success in many areas compared to other States and UTs as reflected in the national averages, there is still a lot to be done, and the most significant obstacle we face is the physical and psychological distance of these islands from the mainland. The importance of these islands to the country in terms of strategic defence and the "Look East" policy cannot be over emphasized and one of the world's busiest trade sea routes passes through our waters. It is therefore but natural, that a Joint Command of the Defence Services, the

only one of its kind in the country, has been established here and we work closely with them to ensure the coastal security and integrity of our territory. As a result of our location, almost 1200 kms from the mainland, we are heavily dependent on shipping and air links. The islands are spread over 8249 sq. kms and comprise 572 big and small islands, of which 37 are inhabited. This further compounds the situation as we have also to provide efficient connectivity between the islands. In the background of the Tsunami in 2004, our efforts to establish and maintain regular connectivity with all islands has assumed even greater importance.

20. Nonetheless, it is a testament to the integrity and zeal of the people of these islands and also the officials of our Administration that visitors are constantly charmed by it and appreciate the facilities which are available. It is a matter of extreme satisfaction that there is complete communal harmony in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands and even now it is a very safe place.

21. Sir, under your guidance, we will be moving ahead to provide higher level of services to the people of these islands and also to do our duty towards the country in terms of protecting the eastern flank. Our plans are based on the guidance given by the Planning Commission and contained in the Twelfth Five Year Plan, and we seek your advice and assistance to enable us to reach our goals.

22. As per the Census 2011, the population of the islands is 3.79 lakhs of which the tribal population is around 30,000. Ever since the spectacular natural beauty of these islands attracted international attention, we are receiving a regular stream of visitors. In 2011 alone, we received 2.17 lakh visitors, in other words the islands received tourists equivalent to 60% of its population, which is a very high number by any standards.

23. Sir, the green cover of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is an unprecedented ninety-four percent of the land, an almost unheard of level of green canopy anywhere in the world. Out of six percent of land available (520.5 sq. km) for development and revenue purposes, 512.8 sq. kms is already under utilization, leaving only 7.7 sq. kms area for further developmental purposes. Consequently, development options in the islands are seriously constrained due to non-availability of land. Additional land is thus a pre-requisite for planned development and for the required expansion of the Joint Command.

24. Land requirement for the next decade has been worked out to be 113 sq. kms which can only be met out from the deemed forest land (162 sq. kms) which has its genesis in the Hon'ble Supreme Court's order dated 12.12.1996, holding that all revenue lands with forest-like features be treated as deemed forests and not used for non-forestry purposes. This would enable the Administration to plan for developmental activities without compromising an already large area of 7171 sq. km. (86.93%) under notified forests. The Administration had filed an Interlocutory Application in 2010 in the Hon'ble Supreme Court seeking permission to use 162.5 sq. km. of deemed forest land for developmental purposes and for felling the natural grown trees without providing any alternative land for compensatory afforestation, and exemption from payment of its net present value. The same is still pending and I would like to request the assistance of the Government of India to expedite this.

25. One of the major challenges that we face is connectivity, both in air and shipping sector. While we appreciate the initiative taken by Air India to introduce a direct flight to Port Blair from Delhi via Bhubaneswar, the size of the aircraft is small

and there is no daily flight. Regrettably, the introduction of several airlines has resulted in cartelisation instead of lowering of rates, as a result of which the fare for this journey from the mainland to Port Blair is often several times that of similar duration and circuits in other parts of the country. Therefore, a favourable dispensation in the route dispersal guidelines at par with North-East and Jammu and Kashmir will help to increase the air connectivity and reduce the fares. We are optimistic that our request will be favourably considered by the Government of India. We are also proposing to establish civil air enclaves at the defence air fields at Campbell Bay in the South, and Diglipur in the North, thereby enabling airlines to operate their regular aircraft to these air fields in addition to Port Blair. This will supplement the inter-island helicopter service which has limited carrying capacity in the case of longer distances such as destinations in the Nicobar Group of Islands.

26. Though ships ply between Port Blair and Chennai, Kolkata and Vizag, the long duration of the voyage (almost 3 days) has made travel by air the preferred mode of transportation for the islanders as well as the tourists visiting these islands. A matter of grave concern is the exorbitantly high airfare for most of the year on the Port Blair sector on all airlines. This is a major disincentive for tourists and also creates resentment amongst the local people, who are often required to travel to the mainland, including for medical treatment. After considering this matter at length, the 13th meeting of the Standing Committee of the Island Development Authority held on 03.05.2011 directed us to charter an aircraft and accordingly, arrangements are being made for operating an aircraft between Chennai/Kolkata and Port Blair. The rationale for this is that since the subsidy per ship ticket is substantially more than the chartered air fare, there will be a resultant benefit for the government too.

27. While the Domestic Airport at Port Blair was declared an International Airport in May 2007 no airlines has taken the initiative so far, to introduce international flights ex-Port Blair, in spite of the tremendous tourism potential. Approximately 96 flights bound for international destinations over-fly Port Blair on a daily basis of which 25 flights land in India. A stopover of any of these international flights at Port Blair will not only be an added attraction for outgoing/incoming traffic from/to India but will be in line with the Planning Commission's statement, urging the need to fully explore all possibilities in our neighbourhood. We look forward to a proactive role from Air India to increase low-cost flights with a stopover at Port Blair for international flights to South East Asia, as this will provide a much-needed boost for these Islands and create a "win-win" situation.

28. In fact, Tourism is one of the few sectors which can contribute to the economic growth of the islands. After the Tsunami (2004), tourism infrastructure has been augmented and various new projects have been completed. There has been a steady increase of tourist inflow over the last five years and in tune with the fragile ecosystem, we are promoting the islands as an eco-friendly destination. However, the new Island Protection Zone notification issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests in January, 2011 laying excessive restrictions has stalled even the development of eco-friendly tourism resorts.

29. In January 2011 my Administration introduced India's one and only seaplane service, by wet-leasing a single-engine, nine seater amphibious seaplane. This service has been introduced mainly for tourists and inter-island connectivity, and in view of its success, we are looking to augment the service by wet-leasing twin-engine amphibian seaplanes.

30. In the shipping sector, both mainland-island and inter-island sectors are being serviced by fairly old vessels. Acquisition of new vessels is a time-consuming exercise and past experience shows that new ships have been delivered much after the scheduled delivery dates. One vessel namely MV Mayabunder is under construction at M/s Alcock Ashdown Gujarat Ltd since 2000, and is yet to be delivered. Owing to the extra-ordinary circumstances under which we find ourselves in the islands, we need permission to buy our vessels from the global market. We are also examining the feasibility of establishing the Andaman Shipping Corporation in order to counter the several limitations being experienced in the shipping sector.

31. In November 2011, the Ministry of Shipping gave its concurrence for undertaking necessary studies towards establishing Transshipment Port at Campbell Bay in Great Nicobar. I am happy to report that Sub-Soil investigation is being undertaken by CWPRS, Pune, to expedite the project, and we should be in a position to complete the survey and investigation within two years in spite of the difficult terrain and detailed inputs required from several agencies.

32. Almost 95% of the power requirement in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands is met by diesel transported from the mainland. The remaining 5% is being met by the sole Hydel Plant. Accordingly, there is a pressing need to explore power generation from fuels other than diesel, besides tapping renewable sources.

33. We are also in urgent need of additional funds of about Rupees 419.7 crores under Non-Plan head of account for the Power Sector, as projected in the Revised Estimate for 2012-13. This amount is required mainly for settlement of pending DGS&D claims towards purchase of HSD for running power houses during the previous years. Around 65,000 Kilo Litres of Diesel is annually used for generation of 95% of power requirement of these islands, which costs around Rupees 260 crores incorporating the present hike. In the process of purchasing diesel from DGS&D over the years on credit basis, the accumulated debit memo is of the order of Rupees 361 crores upto September 2012. We have been asking for a realistic amount in our Budget Estimate and Revised Estimate but for the last few years the same has been curtailed thereby causing the above accumulation.

34. To tap renewable energy sources we have proposed to start projects including Solar Power Plants, Biogas Power Plants and Wind-Powered Systems at Car Nicobar. We are also distributing renewable energy devices at subsidized costs including Solar Lanterns, Solar Cookers, Solar Water Heating Systems, Solar Home Lighting Systems, Biogas Plants and Improved Chullhas. We aspire to be the best archipelago in the world with near total usage of green energy. We intend to educate and sensitize our citizens towards energy savings and to retro-engineer our buildings for reducing our carbon footprint, and move to trade our carbon credits at the global level.

35. Sir, you have been kind enough to discuss the issues pertaining to our Islands at the Island Development Authority. In view of the unique problems being faced by us here, I would like to earnestly request that a separate Plan be created for the Andaman & Nicobar Islands within the Twelfth Plan along the lines of similar plans for other areas in the country.

36. As I have mentioned earlier, 94% of our landmass is under forest cover and we are continuing our activities to conserve and protect this environment and its natural resources including the rich bio-diversity of these islands. The environmental

and forestry programmes which are underway shall be continued including the management and protection of the tropical rain forests and mangroves, including scientific management of the 9 National Parks, 96 Wildlife Sanctuaries and also conservation of the Tribal Reserves.

37. Sir, all of us in these Islands understand and realize that we do not own these forests, for they belong to the generations that will come after us. No one knows better than we do of the need to live in harmony with nature, for it is nature's bounty which is providing us livelihood, and it is nature which must be respected, for it can take away from us at any time, all that we hold dear.

38. To conclude, I would like to reiterate that our aim is to put our Islands on the path of sustainable and inclusive growth and ensure overall development, as also to make our Islands one of the best eco-friendly tourism destinations in the world, by the end of the 12th Five Year Plan. I would like to thank you and the Planning Commission for giving me this opportunity to present the thoughts and aspirations of the people of these Emerald Isles.

JAI HIND