

Speech of CM Meghalaya Dr. Mukul Sangma

Honourable Prime Minister, Distinguished Members of the National Development Council and Friends,

I express my gratitude to the Prime Minister for inviting us to this meeting of the National Development Council to discuss and approve the Twelfth Five Year Plan. I would also like to compliment the Planning Commission for preparing a very insightful document.

2. Growth Target

Given the recent slowdown in the economy, a lower growth target of 8.2 percent viz-a-viz the projection of 9 percent in the Approach Paper for the Twelfth Plan period is appropriate. The objective of the Twelfth Plan is inclusive growth across sectors and across regions. Investment in the more backward States of the country, including the North Eastern States, to correct the regional imbalance that prevails requires a special focus so that we may all join the mainstream in our journey towards prosperity.

3. Growth Target for Meghalaya

Meghalaya's growth during the Eleventh Plan has sustained a trajectory which has been exhibiting a clear rising trend from 3.8% in the Eighth Plan to more than 8% in the Eleventh Plan. This was possible due to significant contributions from the secondary and the tertiary sectors. The contribution of primary sector has, however, been less than 3% per annum. This is, therefore, a thrust area for the State during the Twelfth Plan period.

The draft Plan document acknowledges that during the 11th Plan, Meghalaya grew at 8.1 percent as against the target of 7.3 percent. (Table 11.18). It is, therefore, surprising that the same document sets a lower target of 8.0% for Meghalaya during the Twelfth Plan, though one of the core indicators defined in Chapter One enjoins the State to have a higher average growth rate in the Twelfth Plan than that achieved in the Eleventh Plan! Meghalaya can do better and I strongly feel that if Meghalaya is to catch up with the more developed States in the country, it needs to attain a much higher growth rate, otherwise it is going to lag behind even further. I would, therefore, like to project a growth target of about 11 percent in the Twelfth Plan period for the State of Meghalaya, which I am sure can be achieved through sustainable livelihood programmes and investments in infrastructure and human resource development.

At first glance this target may appear ambitious. It is, however, achievable if the Central Government and the State Government work together. We also believe that we are now getting better at attracting private investment and the agreement for a PPP hospital cum Medical College at Shillong is a good example. Nevertheless, the public sector will have to continue to act as an anchor for bringing about required investments in the region. Simultaneously, the efforts of Government of India and the State Government in fostering a conducive environment for private investment must be sustained through, inter-alia, the NEIPP and other initiatives, especially in infrastructure development and better connectivity for the region.

4. Inclusive growth

Inclusive growth with a focus on poverty reduction, regional balance, reducing inequality, empowerment, employment generation and livelihood provision has been highlighted in the Twelfth Plan document. The State's flagship programme, the "Integrated Basin Development and Livelihood Promotion Programme (IBDLP)", which was launched in April, 2012, seeks to realise these objectives through mission mode interventions in horticulture, aquaculture, animal husbandry, sericulture and weaving, apiculture, energy, water and natural resource management. The core objective of these missions is to facilitate sustainable livelihoods for the people by leveraging upon the abundant natural resources of the State. Simultaneous focus is being ensured to build up an integrated knowledge management system to meet the requirements of scientific planning and participatory development; creation of necessary infrastructure; capacity building; investment promotion; robust regulatory framework; convergence and effective governance. The programme also attempts a paradigm shift in the approach to development facilitation by looking at target groups as entrepreneurs and not merely as beneficiaries. Recently, the State Government has established Entrepreneurship Facilitation Centres in 14 Blocks, which act as a single window for providing necessary assistance and direction to such potential entrepreneurs. We intend to set up such centres in all the remaining Blocks within a short time.

5. Monitorable targets

The Plan document has listed twenty five core indicators for the Twelfth Plan. From my State's perspective, I feel that most of these indicators can be achieved. There are, however, certain indicators which will be difficult for Meghalaya and other Hill States of the North Eastern Region to achieve. In view of the difficult terrain and the huge investment involved, it would be almost impossible to provide electricity and all weather road communication to all villages within 5 years. While we endorse the need to increase rural tele-density to 70 percent and also providing banking access to 90 percent of the populace, the fact remains that our baseline for both is extremely low. It is, therefore, vital that the Government of India comes out with specific programmes for the North East to make these targets a reality. These could be on the lines of the SARDP-NE.

6. Promoting Convergence and Co-ordination

During the past two years, we have taken several initiatives for ensuring convergence to maximize investments in developmental programmes. These include use of State funds to up-grade infrastructure made under NREGS, gap funding and partnerships with communities. Institutional mechanisms and processes at the State and District levels have been reorganized to make this a reality. We have also set up three institutions of excellence viz. the Institute of Natural Resources, Institute of Entrepreneurship and Institute of Governance with the aim of building the capacities of the various stakeholders in the developmental process right from the village level to the highest levels in the State. Of these, the Institute of Governance drives governance reforms and institutional capacity building.

7. SDP growth and quality of life

While the steady increase in our GSDP growth over the last three Plan periods is a matter of some satisfaction, we also realise that more investments either from Government or private sector and consequentially higher GSDP growth rate, needs to be accompanied by interventions focussed on improving quality of life in terms of more opportunities for livelihoods, skill development, improvements in health services, education and in particular, conserving natural resources which are so vital to our way of life.

We have, therefore, re-oriented our development strategy to address this. Some of the highlights of this approach to improving quality of life are:

- 9 Missions under IBDLP for enabling multiple livelihoods;
- Thrust on livelihoods based on sustainable and intelligent natural resource management;
- Externally aided projects for skill development and investments in secondary education;
- Universal health insurance scheme synergised with RSBY, covering entire population;
- 2 new medical colleges;
- Integrated Water Resource Management;
- Women's Economic Empowerment Scheme for financial inclusion for enterprise promotion.

All these have been designed to work in tandem with the existing Centrally Sponsored Schemes being implemented in the State.

8. Special Area Programmes

We support the proposals for increasing outlays under the Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF) and the Border Areas Development Programme (BADP). Both these programmes have filled a long felt and vital need and the results on the ground are clearly visible. They have helped us in meeting the aspirations in the areas which have long suffered from benign neglect. The recent revision in the guidelines of BADP is particularly welcome as this has enabled greater involvement of communities in asset creation and maintenance. We also support the recognition of sub districts within the implementation framework of the BRGF. Given the high proportion of tribal population in our State and a legacy of backwardness in almost all our Districts, I would request a separate State level funding window for Meghalaya within BRGF or alternatively, inclusion of all its Districts and Sub Districts for district and sub district level funding.

9. Investment in Infrastructure

The North East in general and Meghalaya in particular have suffered for long due to infrastructure deficit. We, therefore, appreciate the proposals outlined in the Document for reducing this deficit.

Roads are the State's only mode of connectivity. As we have heavy rainfall and lush growth in vegetation, periodic renewal of our State Highways and major

district roads is essential so that these lifelines remain passable. I would, therefore, urge provisioning, which would permit us to do a periodic renewal and recarpeting of all State Highways and major district roads once in 5 years, in a phased manner. We would also like to see early completion of on-going projects under SARDP-NE. The SARDP-NE has the potential to transform the North East and therefore, there is a strong justification for a phase C of SARDP-NE.

Our concerns about norms of PMGSY and other Central Schemes have been highlighted in the document. These need to be addressed expeditiously.

10. Connectivity

Meghalaya hopes to get its first railway line by March, 2013. We remain hopeful that the 12th Plan will see the completion of the other railway projects planned for the State.

Inadequate telecom connectivity has become a major bottleneck to productivity enhancement. The document recognises this but stops short of suggesting a solution. I would, therefore, seek the indulgence of the Planning Commission for monitoring implementation of a time bound action plan for ensuring reliable telecom connectivity for the Region. The option of providing an alternative telecom link through the OFC landing point at Cox Bazar in Bangladesh needs to be explored seriously and vigorously.

11. Aquaculture Mission

We have launched the Aquaculture Mission under the umbrella of the Meghalaya Integrated Basin Development and Livelihood Promotion Programme to tap the huge potential for fish production in the State. To bridge the gap between consumption and production of fish, fish production will have to grow at more than 12.0 per cent per annum during the Twelfth Plan period. The Aquaculture Mission will seek to bring about area expansion under fisheries and also provide sustainable livelihood by ensuring quality fish seed, training in improved methods of rearing as well as marketing of their produce. Special attention to hatchery development, feed mills in a PPP mode and technology induction is being given. At the end of the Twelfth Plan period, we hope to become self-sufficient in fish production.

12. State Water Mission

Water being a bountiful resource in my State needs to be harnessed for productive use and ground water recharge. We have taken steps in this direction through a State Water Mission. This encapsulates knowledge of water resources, emerging demand patterns, participatory management and integration of efforts of all stakeholders. Towards this end, we have established a State Water Resources Council to promote policy convergence, an Integrated Water Resource Development Agency to facilitate pooling in of resources and technical capacities and District Water Resources Councils to ensure effective designing and implementation of water resource projects. A fresh thrust is being given to comprehensive basin planning, water quality monitoring and management and creation of Jal Kunds for upland and hitherto rainfed areas.

13. Trade and Transit with Bangladesh

The opening of border haats has brought about renewed hope and has greatly improved the economy of the people residing along the Indo-Bangladesh border. We hope that more such border haats will be opened so that trade can

flourish as it used to in the earlier times. The markets for the N.E. Region historically and geographically lie in our neighbouring countries, and these need to be rebuilt with appropriate trade protocols and improvement of infrastructure at the export points. Basic infrastructure such as communication, power, etc. to the existing land custom stations in the region is urgently required as this will provide an impetus to trade between our country and Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar.

14. Financial inclusion

One of the key monitorable indicators purposed relates to banking services. I am glad that this finds a place. If India is under served by financial services on every parameter, then it gets even worse in the North East. The expansion of banking services is of paramount importance and the recent opening of offices of the Reserve Bank of India in the State capitals is a welcome first step. However, much more needs to be done. It would be appropriate if a strategy for this is outlined in the final document.

15. Conclusion

I believe that Meghalaya is on a high growth path. We have been trying out several new initiatives during the recent years so as to bring about growth which is sustainable and inclusive. We have been taking steps to overcome our constraints such as high population growth, need for skill enhancement, leveraging our natural resources, market linkages, etc. Further, there is also an urgent need for harnessing our strengths. We believe that our rich cultural heritage needs to be tapped, protected and nourished. This is also true of the rich bio-diversity found in our State.

To conclude, I would like to thank the Government of India including the Planning Commission for their continuous guidance and assistance towards the development of my State. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Hon'ble Prime Minister for providing me with this opportunity to speak before this eminent gathering. Finally, I once again commend the work done by the Planning Commission in preparing such an exhaustive document for the Twelfth Five Year Plan.

Thank you.

JAI HIND