

Address by
Dr. (Tmt.) RAJANI RAI,
Her Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor

49th N.D.C. Meeting, 1st September 2001, Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi.

Hon'ble Prime Minister, Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission and distinguished members of the National Development Council,

It gives me great pleasure to participate in this meeting and to place before this esteemed body my views on the agenda notes circulated by the Planning Commission.

It is heartening to note that the "Approach paper to the Tenth Plan 2002-07" aims at 8.7 percent GDP growth rate with a view to doubling the per capita income and improving the quality of life of our people in the next 10 years. Looking at our past performance during the Eighth and Ninth Plans, even the intermediate GDP growth rate of 8 percent for the first half of the period is certainly an ambitious target. I therefore strongly endorse the views of the experts that the anticipated growth can be achieved only through "concerted action in several areas and radical departure from the present practices".

As far as Pondicherry is concerned, we will make all out efforts to accelerate our development so that the growth rate proposed in the Tenth Plan is achieved. However, I may mention that though Pondicherry has shown remarkable progress in trade and commerce over the years, it is still industrially backward. The territory is endowed with very little resources capable of exploitation for industrial growth. Most of the raw materials required for industries will have to come from outside the territory. There is no market within the territory and the growth of industries is dependent on the extent of concessions shown to industries to market their products outside the state. With the implementation of the decision to stop extension of Sales Tax related concessions to new industries, the industrial growth in Pondicherry will slow down unless some other concessions are extended by way of incentives. I therefore urge upon the Central Government to provide a package of incentives for boosting industrial growth in backward areas.

Infrastructure development is another area of growth which needs our attention. In this connection, I may mention that the absence of a broad gauge railway line connecting Pondicherry with the rest of India is a major handicap for tourism and industrial development of the territory. The conversion of the existing 40 Kms. metre gauge railway line between Villupuram and Pondicherry into broad gauge, which was approved by the Planning Commission in 1999-2000, is still to be taken up for implementation. I would urge upon the Ministry of Railways to start this work in the current year itself. Besides, the Final Location Survey for the railway line connecting Tindivanam, Pondicherry and Cuddalore needs to be taken up. The proposed extension of the Tanjavur - Nagore line to Karaikal which is only 12 Kms also requires immediate attention of the Ministry of Railways. These projects, when implemented will push up the pace of development of the Union Territory of Pondicherry.

Though Pondicherry has a small Airport constructed in 1989, there is no airline operating from this Airport. It is essential that an airline service is started urgently connecting Pondicherry with Chennai and Bangalore. In order to provide regular services by operating bigger aircrafts, the runway needs extension. I request the Ministry of Civil Aviation to take immediate necessary steps to extend the runway, as an air link with the rest of the country is very vital for our growth and development.

On the Power sector, Pondicherry has been allocated additional power to the extent of 13 MW from the expansion project of the Ramagundam Super Thermal Power Station, which will be available from 2004. In view of our increasing power needs/ we have requested for allocation of 50 MW from the proposed expansion project. I request the Ministry of Power to favourably consider this and agree to this allocation. Meanwhile, I would earnestly request the Ministry of Power to allocate additional 20 MW to Pondicherry from out of the unallocated share of Central Generating Stations to tide over the present situation. I may also mention that we propose to expand the capacity of our Gas Power Plant in Karaikal from 32.5 MW to 132.5 MW. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas have not yet allocated the gas requirement of 3 lakh cubic metres per day on a firm basis. I request the Ministry to take an early decision in this matter.

It is a matter of great satisfaction to note that the population growth in the country has decelerated below 2% for the first time in four decades. In order to accelerate economic growth and to guarantee food security to the teeming millions, our focus should be on further reduction in population growth. Focus should also be placed on other demographic indices which will be reflective of the qualitative improvement in human lives. In this connection I am happy to inform that the decadal growth rate of population in the Union Territory of Pondicherry has come down from 33.64% in 1991 to 20.56% in 2001. This is indicative of our successful implementation of family welfare programmes. Besides, the results of the First Population Census of the millennium has revealed that in the Union Territory of Pondicherry, the sex ratio has improved from 979 to 1001, the female literacy rate has gone up from 65.63 % to 74.13%, the death rate has come down from 10.5 to 6.9 per thousand and the infant mortality rate has declined from 33.9 to 22 per thousand. These are healthy indicators of growth and we take genuine pride in this achievement. I am also happy to inform that the National Population Commission has ranked Pondicherry as the Number One among 35 States and Union Territories based on a composite index of 13 vital health indicators like complete immunization^ safe delivery system, sex ratio, infant mortality rate/ complete ante natal care of pregnant women, etc.

The Approach Paper has agreed with the criticism voiced by representatives of farmers that liberalization has not touched the agricultural sector so far. The necessity to increase cropping intensity and productivity in view of the shrinking agricultural land/ the need for scientific watershed development in the light of over exploitation of ground water and the urgency to diversify agricultural products and to invest more in the area of irrigation, seeds etc., point towards the need for another green revolution in agriculture so that every Indian remains 'Hunger Free' in the new millennium. The nation has to adopt sustainable development in agriculture based on the successful experiment of the Bio-village Programme implemented in Pondicherry by the Swaminathan Foundation and replicate its success in other parts of India so as to reduce over dependence on chemical fertilizers and pesticides which causes

environmental pollution and health hazards. This programme is proposed to be extended to all villages in Pondicherry during the Tenth Plan. One great benefit of the programme is that it has resulted in empowerment of rural women and has given them lot of confidence in / managing self-help groups, agri-business and information centres.

Development programmes have been the domain of the Government since independence. With the increase in population/ trade and industries and general improvement in the standards of living/ the demand on infrastructure like roads/ port/ railways/ health/ power/ etc. has grown enormously, requiring large investments. The resource available with Government being limited/ external assistance is increasingly becoming not only important but also necessary. For the State Governments and Union Territories there are a number of schemes which require to be funded through external sources/ by identifying suitable donor agencies. Presently, this is centrally administered by the Department of Economic Affairs, Government of India/ and the normal time taken for a viable project to get financial assistance is two to three years, which is time consuming. Besides, there are hurdles preventing the donor agencies from directly funding the projects. Assistance has to be routed through the Department of Economic Affairs which causes undue delay in release of funds. In a liberalized economy, where time is a constraint and development programmes have to be implemented faster to keep pace with the fast changing international economy/ external assistance has to flow quicker and in a more transparent manner. Procedures need to be simplified and accounting methods are to be evolved in such a manner that direct assistance is ensured to enable faster implementation of the programmes.

The implementation of poverty alleviation programmes poses a big challenge in ensuring that the resources ultimately reach the poor who are targeted. It is really gratifying to note that the percentage of the population in poverty in the country has declined from 36 in 1993-94 to 26.10 in 1999-2000. I am happy to inform that the percentage of people below the poverty line in the Union Territory of Pondicherry has come down to 20.55 from 32.48 during the same period. This is a clear indication of the success of the implementation of our programme. However/ the very fact that the territory of Pondicherry is not contiguous and that the four distant pockets are geographically surrounded by the three states of Andhra Pradesh/Tamil Nadu and Kerala/ the percentage is likely to vary/ depending on the extent of migration of population. We are therefore agreeable to the adjusted share of 0,038 in the allocation of funds for JRY, IRDP and allied programmes.

As pointed out in the Approach Paper/a number of shortcomings have been identified in the execution of the Centrally Sponsored Schemes. One of the drawbacks of the CSS is that the pattern or assistance for such schemes are evolved uniformly, without taking into consideration the grass-root level problems faced by the States and UTs. It may be necessary to allow a certain amount of leeway in adjusting the pattern of assistance or varying the priorities in-built into the scheme, according to the local/ ground level requirements. In many cases/ funds under the schemes are released at the fag end of the year/ which goes against their effective implementation. In order that the schemes are properly implemented and the funds usefully employed, release of funds should be properly regulated. It has been informed that a review of the CSS is being made by the Planning Commission

to converge schemes with similar objectives and weed out those which have outlived their utility. In this connection I may inform that a similar exercise is being done in Pondicherry for not only CSS schemes but also Plan schemes and the Working Groups constituted for the purpose have already started their deliberations. The reports will be made available by the end of September.

We are determined to conduct the elections to the Local Bodies during the current financial year. Elections could not be held earlier because of certain court orders. We have already approached the High Court for clarificatory orders on certain important issues and we hope that the petitions will be disposed of by the Court shortly. In the meantime, the State Election Commission has already taken steps to update the electoral rolls, which are expected to be ready by the 1st week of November 2001. The elections to the Local Bodies will be held immediately thereafter.

Providing transparency is one of the basic objectives of our Administration. We have already published the Citizens' Charter in respect of 42 departments which have been computerised and networked with the Secretariat. I am glad to inform that recently for the first time in the country, we successfully conducted auctions for arrack shops through the Internet. This received acclaim from all quarters since the procedure not only provided transparency but also ensured that there was no malpractice or manipulation by any vested interests. We intend to adopt the same procedure in respect of tenders for major works in Public Works department and other departments.

Before I conclude, let me mention with gratitude that with the support and assistance from Government of India, the Union Territory of Pondicherry has been able to achieve outstanding growth in health/ education, and other social sectors of development, through effective implementation of Plan schemes. In the Tenth Plan/ we are keen to ensure not only a higher level of growth but also better quality of life for the people of Pondicherry/ as only healthier citizens reflect the health of the society. As we progress in the new millennium, our desire is to showcase Pondicherry as a unique place for growth and development, without losing sight of social justice and needs of the poor and the less privileged. I am sure the Government of India will continue to support the initiatives and endeavours of the Government of Pondicherry, as before.

Prime Minister Sir, I express my sincere thanks for the opportunity given to me to express my views and for the patient hearing given by the members present here.

JAI HIND