

Accelerating Development in North East

Feature
DONER

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In India, North East Region is recognized as an area with physical and social infrastructure deficit. Special development efforts are being made to fast track the economic growth of the region. Since eighth plan period Central Government is devising ways for this purpose through various policy initiatives.

North East States are categorized as Special Category States and are granted central assistance on liberal terms. Establishment of North Eastern Council (NEC) in 1971, earmarking (since 1998-99) of atleast 10% of Plan Budgets of Non Exempted Central Ministries/Departments for expenditure in North East Region, creation of Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources(NLCPR) in 1997-98 from accrual of unutilized 10% earmarked funds are some of the initiatives taken to push for the development of NER.

In spite of these initiatives, the development process in NER has been too tardy due to non-completion of several projects on time for the reasons mainly relating to problems being faced in land acquisition & forest clearance, law & order situation and the limited working season due to climatic conditions prevailing in the region. Keeping in view this tardiness and performance analysis of the States during 10th and 11th Plans the Government has given special emphasis on development of North East India during 12th Plan period. Road map for development of NER in respect of railways, telecommunications, roads, power and inland waterways has been prepared.

Railways- Master Plan for development of railway infrastructure in the North-Eastern States includes connectivity to all State capitals, uni-gauge broad-gauge network in the region, augmentation of network capacity for handling growth of traffic in future, expansion of network to unconnected areas of the region, strengthening international borders and improving trade and connectivity with neighboring countries.

Twenty major infrastructural projects for New Line, Doubling and Gauge Conversion are sanctioned and ongoing in North Eastern States. These include 10 National Projects. Together these major projects cover a length of 2919 km. at a cost of Rs. 38310 crore.

Telecommunication- Comprehensive Telecom Development Plan for North East Region (NER) includes provision of 2G mobile coverage in identified uncovered areas, provision of seamless 2G mobile coverage along the National Highways in NER and ensuring reliability of and redundancy in the transmission network at State capitals and district headquarters in NER.

In its meeting held on 13.06.2014, the Telecom Commission has approved the proposal to implement the Comprehensive Telecom Development Plan at an estimated project cost of Rs. 5336.18 crore.

Roads- Special Accelerated Road Development Program for North East (SARDP-NE) includes up gradation of 10141 kms. road stretches of National Highways and State Roads, aims

to upgrade National Highways connecting State Capitals to 4 lane or 2 lane and to provide connectivity to all 88 District Headquarter towns of NER by at least 2-lane road. So far approval for 2/4 laning of 6418 kms. of various categories of roads under Phase 'A' and Arunachal Package of SARDP-NE in entire North-East at an estimated investment of Rs. 33,500 crore has been given. The target date of completion of Phase 'A' of SARDP-NE is March, 2017 and Arunachal Package is March, 2018.

Power- Development of Power sector among other things includes power generation and transmission.

Generation: A generation capacity addition program of 5596 MW in the North Eastern Region;

Transmission: A comprehensive scheme for strengthening of transmission and distribution system in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim at an estimated cost of Rs. 4754.42 crore; 'NER Power System Improvement Project' for strengthening of Transmission and Distribution system in Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. The estimated cost of the scheme is Rs. 4923.32 crore and providing access to electricity to rural households during XII Five Year Plan with the total project cost of Rs. 2311.37 crore.

Inland Waterways-Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) has a mandate to develop National Waterways including National Waterways-2 (River Brahmaputra) from Bangladesh Border (near Dhubri) to Sadiya for the purpose of inland water transport and Development of Barak River from Lakhimpur to Bhanga (121 km) as a National Waterway at an estimated cost of Rs. 141 crore at 2014 price.

But now Centre is making efforts to put the development of NER on fast track through comprehensive approach. Be it power or connectivity. This is evident from the fact that last three months have seen a host of targets to achieve within a scheduled time frame with substantial budgetary support to further timely development of NER.

The Process of thorough review for schemes of 53 non-exempted Ministries/ Departments is underway. Review of schemes will not only maximize benefits but will also enable concerned Ministries/Departments to perform well. Besides thorough review of these projects, seamless implementation of development projects in NER by inter-ministerial consultations is being ensured.

Conference of Chief Ministers of NE States was held from 21st to 22nd August, 2014 at Guwahati under the aegis of Minister of State (I/C), DoNER. In the conference, Chief Ministers of NE States, Central Ministers, Members of Parliament, many senior officials of NE States, Central line Ministries and North Eastern Council attended and actively participated to deliberate on developmental issues of NE States under six working groups. The issues are Connectivity addressing road (waterways/railway/aviation /telecom); HRD including education (primary & Higher) and skill development; Water supply, health & sanitation and Agriculture/Horticulture (Animal Husbandry/Sericulture and Minor Irrigation).

Two new schemes have been initiated by Ministry of DoNER in the current year of 2014-15. Rs. 100 crores have been allocated for organic farming in NE which has immense potential for organic farming. Another scheme is North East Road Corporation for constructing, expanding

/improving the road infrastructure in North East. Two hundred crores have been earmarked for this scheme in the current year.

An MoU has been signed between North Eastern Council (NEC) and Alliance Air, the wholly owned subsidiary of Air India, on 24th September, 2014 for flight operations in the North East under Viability Gap Funding (VGF) scheme of NEC to connect Shillong, Lilabari, Tezpur and Silchar with Kolkata/Guwahati.

The north-eastern states rail connectivity is a mission area for new government. The works in the north east have taken seen maximum speed in construction activity. On 11th August 2014, Meghalaya got its rail connectivity with the completion of the Duhnoi-Mendipathar lines. Three more lines into the North east will be completed this year. Southern Assam will soon be brought under the broad gauge network with the start of the longest ever Gauge conversion project between Luding and Silchar measuring 210 kms.

The focused approach to development, timely completion of projects with support and participation of skilled locals will not only bridge the development deficit but will also help assuage the deep rooted feeling of alienation.

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