**Speech of Shri Manik Sarkar, Chief Minister, Tripura**

**66th Meeting of NEC held at New Delhi on 29th May 2017**

Hon’ble Minister DoNER and Chairman, NEC, Hon’ble Governors and Chief Minister of North East Sister States, Distinguished Member of the NE Council, Officers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset please allow me to convey my thanks to all of you for attending this meeting. I must thank Minister DoNER and Chairman, NEC for convening this meeting. I would like to suggest to hold two meetings of NEC in a year. One meeting may be in the beginning of the Financial Year to finalize the annual budget and plan, and next one after a considerable time gap to undertake a review of the activities and performance on the basis of the budget and the adopted time specific schemes and projects.

The State exists for the people, especially for those who cannot fend for themselves. The NE Council represents the collective efforts of the Government to work for the betterment of the lives of the poorest of our people, who abound in the region.

The NEC is mandated to prepare a unified and coordinated Regional Plan, set priorities and implement with all seriousness and sincerity. Today’s meeting assumes added significance as we will consider three year Regional Plan for the North East. In order to have a meaningful Regional Plan, there is an earnest need to first identify and assess the burning and pressing problems of the region and set priorities.

I would again like to recall and flag some of the concerns of our region that need to be addressed with topmost priority to bring a meaningful change and balanced development, and to make it at par with other regions of the country.

The Per Capita Income in the NE States is low as compared to the National level; there is low production and productivity in agriculture and allied sectors, which are the primary source of income and occupation in the region. The potential of primary sector driven economic growth has not been properly tapped. There is low level of industrialization in comparison to other regions of the country. Public Sector Undertakings have a limited presence. Connectivity though road, rail, air and telecommunication is a serious constraint in both economic and social development. The potentiality of power generation, transmission and distribution has not been fully harnessed. The Credit-Deposit ratio in the NE region is low compared to other regions of the country. Extremist activities have retarded development in the long run.

The North Eastern Council while preparing the Regional Plan should suggest suitable strategies to overcome these constraints. Instead of a piecemeal approach, the Council should prepare a realizable long term comprehensive and composite development plan, which may include a short term and medium term plan for the Region. Regular analysis of this plan may be done.

Now I would very humbly share my views on the other agenda items.

Many of the issues that Tripura had raised at the last meeting are not fully resolved, or even substantially addressed. These include some road projects, iron removal plant, upgrading Agartala airport as an international terminal, telecom connectivity, devising a composite rehabilitation package for surrendered militants and repatriation of Reang migrants from Mizoram. Necessary fruitful action on each of these issues is warranted.

NEC schemes have been converted into Central Sector schemes. Funds for NEC schemes should, however, continue to be placed with State Government for implementation through its agencies instead of concentrating everything in the hands of the Union Government.

NEC has proposed an outlay for Rs. 925 crore for 2017-18. This allocation is too small to take care of the ongoing incomplete projects leaving hardly any worth mentioning amount for new projects in the pipeline. This will not fulfill the fund requirement of the region. The Union Government is emphasizing on Look East Policy for which most modern and basic infrastructure are required to be developed. But the financial assignment to NEC is not commensurate with this policy. Consequent to the abolition of the Planning Commission, and discontinuation of Special Plan Assistance to the Special Category States, the role of NEC as a medium of restoring regional balance becomes very important. In order to address the problem of regional disparity, NEC should be adequately funded and its budget during 2017-18 should be substantially enhanced to at least partly compensate for the discontinued Special Plan Assistance that was provided through the Planning Commission.

On the Regional Plan proposed, I have some suggestions. The NER States should be allowed to set up grid interactive load based solar plant to meet the renewable power obligation. For the people of the North East to get full benefit from the link with the submarine cable at Chiattagong, necessary telecom equipments like GGSN and SGSN should be established at Agartala International Gateway(IGW). Landline, broadband and mobile service needs to be extended to all uncovered villages of all NE States, including Tripura. The quality of mobile service also needs very urgent improvement. In order to provide regional connectivity particularly between Agartala- Kailashahar-Silchar-Guwahati, Kailashahar and Kamalpur Airports should be made operational. Early completion of the Agartala- Akhaura rail link and rail connectivity with Bangladesh needs to be expedited. Access to Chittagong port of Bangladesh via Sabroom needs to be fructified as early as possible. The survey and execution of works for establishing rail connectivity from Agartala to Kalay in Myanmar needs to be taken up with all seriousness. Setting up of one Railway Division and opening of Railway Recruitment Board in Tripura is a long pending demand of the State which merits consideration. The funding pattern under Border Area Development scheme should be continued as 100% grant for the NE States.

The proposed normative allocation of NEC funds for the States can be operationalized to begin with. Changes, if any, may be considered based on the experience in its implementation.

I would also highlight some other very important and relevant issues to draw the kind attention of the Union Government for taking necessary steps to provide relief to the deserving people.

At present rice is being supplied @ 5 kg per head per month. This is not sufficient and requires to be enhanced to at least 7 Kg., if not 10 Kg.. All residents of the region need to be covered. Distribution of subsidized sugar through PDS has been discontinued for other than for AAY cardholders by Government of India. In the interest of the poor people, it should be continued. Frequent price-rise of K. Oil is adversely affecting the life of poor people. Hike in prices of K. Oil through PDS should be reversed.

Scope of generation of man-days through labour budget should not be curtailed; rather thrust should to be given to achieve at least 100 manday per year per family, if not 200 mandays, immediately. Systems for payment of wages under MGNREGA is complicated and needs to be simplified while maintaining transparency.

The allocation under the scheme of Modernization of Police Force has been drastically reduced during last two financial years. Due to insufficient allocation of fund, activities like construction for various police organizations, including housing, are being adversely affected. The allocation for MoPF should be increased and allocation needs to be done according to the ground realities of the NE States.

At present, 10% of deployment cost of CAPF personnel is being charged by Government of India. The MHA has raised a claim with the State Government for payment of outstanding dues against deployment cost of CRPF and BSF. This includes a penalty @ 2.5 per cent on the outstanding amount. This system should be reversed and NE States should be made free from this sort of unwanted and unbearable extra economic burden.

I am confident that the deliberations and the decisions of this NEC meeting would help address our concerns expeditiously and go a long way to faster development of the North Eastern Region.

Thank you all.