

MEGHALAYA STATE PLANNING BOARD MEET
MEGHALAYA SECRETARIAT CONFERENCE HALL
11.00 A.M. AUGUST 25, 2008

INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY SHRI P.A. SANGMA,
HON'BLE CHAIRMAN

Distinguished members present

I have the pleasure to welcome you to the first meeting of the recently constituted State Planning Board, Government of Meghalaya. It is with intent and purpose that this meeting has been convened. Contrary to 'lay' belief and notion, the State Planning Board will be a 'think tank', formulating policy initiative in key sectors of the society, economy and polity and forwarding the same to the Government of Meghalaya to propel them into action. The Meghalaya State Planning Board, a key public institution under the Government of Meghalaya will fulfill its intended mandate.

You are aware that a think tank is visibly the key necessity to the preparation of a comprehensive public policy for Meghalaya. Noble ideas and unassailable facts would be the tools which this think tank will work upon. To keep abreast with changing demands, requirements and necessities we have called upon distinguished persons of our country to share their knowledge and experience as we endeavour to chart the State's public policy. It is my desire to bring together this diversity of ideas and knowledge under one platform (that of the State Planning Board) to enable us to interact face to face. It is here that we will see the first stages of conception – of ideas, the first and foremost function of a think tank. The creation of ideas and knowledge knows no bounds or constraints of race, religion, territory, culture but is exemplified and magnified when committed minds unite for a common objective.

In the year 2005, the Prime Minister of India Dr. Mammohan Singh constituted the National Knowledge Commission, a think tank and a high level advisory body entrusted with the responsibility of considering public policy. The National Knowledge Commission had the primary objective of transforming India into a knowledge society. Various states in India

have not lacked far behind in giving shape to this idea, an idea unheard of even twenty years ago. Today Reliance Infocomm Ltd. have established the Dhirubhai Ambani Knowledge City at Navi Mumbai. In the same measure, the Parsvanath Nano City will be developed as a knowledge city in Panchkula, near Chandigarh (about 200kms from New Delhi) while Bidadi Knowledge City will be established in Karnataka and the L&T Knowledge city will be established in Baroda (Gujarat). The question before us today is, can Meghalaya lack far behind? Can we endeavour to make the Meghalaya State Planning Board a State Knowledge Commission?

You are here today on account of the immense contributions you have made to society in your different fields of expertise. It is my firm belief that State Planning Board should include present and former legislators, officials of government departments, domain experts, academicians, representatives of the community, civil society leaders, representatives of local self-government bodies and all those who are seriously and persistently mindful of the overall development of the State. The State Planning Board, Government of Meghalaya seeks to harness your skills and proficiency to prepare a blue print that will re-shape the social, economic, political and administrative contours of Meghalaya.

At this point of time I place before your consideration the following agenda as an intellectual and a practical stimulus to initiate a “thinking” and a “doing” exercise that beckons us.

A. A foremost challenge that lies before us is the task to revitalise the existing institutions in the State as capacity builders. Capacity building should be an exercise that: a) strengthens the knowledge, skill and ability and behaviour of individuals b) improves the existing institutional structures in such a way that enable an organisation to efficiently meet its goals and objectives. Institutions such as universities and colleges, training and research centres across the State must be active participants in capacity building. Their contributions to capacity building must progress beyond training. Capacity building should include:

Human resource development: This process equips individuals with the understanding, skills and access to information, knowledge and training that enables them to perform effectively.

Organizational development: This process involves the extension of management structures, processes and procedures, not only within organizations but also the management of relationships between the different organizations and sectors (public, private and community).

Institutional and legal framework development: This process involves making legal and regulatory changes to enable organizations, institutions and agencies at all levels and in all sectors to enhance their capacities for better performance and better output.

B. It is imperative that research and development must follow hand in hand in all key sectors of the economy. A key malaise has been the implementation ‘*in-toto*’ of central government sponsored schemes in accordance with central government guidelines. These guidelines should act only as a broad framework within which the implementation of schemes is undertaken. Research and development must be undertaken to understand the local environment (such as topography, soil structure, mineral content, climatic conditions, local institutions, cost escalations etc.) under which a central scheme is being implemented. Local conditions and local concerns need to be given due care and attention to ensure that the scheme is successfully implemented.

Research and development must be undertaken in key sectors such as road communication, tourism, mining and geology, health and family welfare, education, power, water resource harvesting and management and rural development to ensure that centrally sponsored schemes are accommodative of local conditions.

C. The present structure of ministries also needs to be introspected upon. The bifurcation and trifurcation of ministries and departments had taken place to accommodate political interests in jumbo sized ministries (Finance - Excise, Revenue, Taxation; Home - Police, Passport, Civil Defense and Home Guards; PWD – Eastern Zone, Western Zone, Roads, Buildings etc). With the ceiling and downsizing on the number of ministries that a government can have, the structure of these ministries was never reorganised. The result today is that 12 ministers handle about 47 ministries/departments in the State. There is lack of co-ordination between the different departments and ministries as closely related departments and ministries are under different ministers and administrative officers (eg.

Finance-Revenue-Taxation-Excise/Agriculture -Horticulture/Elementary and Mass Education-Higher and Technical Education). Thus a number of ministries and departments whose activities are inter-related need to be re-integrated/merged into one ministry. This is necessary to facilitate better co-ordination among the departments and put in place a speedy delivery mechanism. A possible solution to this administrative problem may lie in the past. There is need to look back at how ministries were organised when the State was created in 1972.

This process of reorganisation of ministries and departments must be accompanied by firm political will that is committed to take recourse to legislative measures.

D. Institutional and legal framework development – The task of the Meghalaya State Planning Board is to prepare a regulatory framework within which it can function and enhance its capacity of providing a policy direction to the Government of Meghalaya. The legal framework under which the Board exists should be strengthened. Policy guidelines should be framed to enable the Board to function more efficiently. Further, the Board should lay down essential organisational and institutional prerequisites to assist the government in implementing its objectives for economic, social and political progress with focus and clarity in an atmosphere of efficiency and transparency.

E. We are familiar with the entrenched malaises of bad governance - corruption, time and cost overruns, dilatory and poor quality public services, frequent breakdowns of law and order, etc. On the other hand we are well aware that good governance makes a huge and positive contribution to indicators of the quality of life - per capita income, longevity, infant mortality, literacy, etc. Good governance therefore, is a necessity. For governance to improve, it is necessary to increase the governance capacity of the State. Governance capacity is the ability of the State to effectively carry out the responsibility and functions with which it is entrusted. The enormous diversity of the tasks performed by a modern welfare state requires the existence or development of a vast range of skills, commitment and competence on the part of those entrusted with discharging these tasks competently and honestly. If a modern state over-relies on bureaucrats and political representatives without domain expertise and professionalism for discharging its functions, its performance can be dismally low. Therefore, systemic changes need to be brought about to enhance the

governance capacity of the State. These changes require, not the abolition of the political system or the bureaucracy, but the injection of professionalism and of civil society in governance. Global experience with New Public Management (NPM) in democratic countries suggests that a happy confluence of a democratic political system, a dedicated and action-oriented bureaucracy, professional management and civil society participation will significantly raise the governance capacity of a state. Taking a cue out of Malaysia during 1970 to 1995, the country provided an instructive example of how a third world state that had inherited British public administration like India could dramatically enhance its governance capacity, and grow rapidly, in part by enhancing its governance capacity. Malaysia's economic success has been due to its rapid industrialization and exports-led growth drive beginning in the 1970s, its business friendly government, its innovations in governance that transformed it into a potent developmental state with a strong public-private sector partnership and large foreign investment. Malaysia's governance innovations in the 1980s and 1990s were driven from the top.

In concluding, I once again call upon you to offer your invaluable services to enable the Meghalaya State Planning Board prepare a road map to structural and administrative reforms for the socio-economic development of the State. The Meghalaya State Planning Board should function as a primary policy actor working in a pluralistic, open and accountable process of policy analysis and taking initiative in research, decision-making and evaluation process. Your concerted efforts will pave the way for the Board to prepare a comprehensive State Plan for reform and innovation through discussions and consensus building, extensive documentation, information dissemination, extensive training, careful monitoring and follow-up, recognition of services rendered through incentives and rewards and above all, executed in an atmosphere of transparency and accountability.

Thank You