

Visit Notes on tour to Arunachal Pradesh accompanied by APS to Minister (S Pathak)

2nd February 2015

Arrived at Itanagar after a long delay in the scheduled helicopter shuttle from Guwahati. Learnt later during discussion and by actual travel that this service was always delayed and not amenable to planning by passengers of their connecting flights for which they had to make considerable allowance including for the possibility that the flight could be cancelled without notice despite good weather conditions and availability of passengers. This was also the reason for poor viability despite provision of subsidy by MHA to the Govt-owned Pawan Hans and private Sky One.

Prior to the review meeting in the Planning department Conference Hall, inspected the Secretariat under construction (before it became dark). The set of buildings have been nicely designed and construction was in process in the rear building. Overall quality appears satisfactory. Some rooms have been brought into use but full use is yet to start. The inner rooms are of 10.5 ft height which appears incompatible with an adequate air cooling system which is clearly also not perhaps required for all areas as presently planned. With a large number of Air Handling Units (AHU) and a lack of passive energy saving systems (glazed glass frontage notwithstanding), the burden of maintenance is likely to be very high for an already overburdened State Government. Since fans have not been provided, dependence on air conditioning is total and could have been avoided if fasteners for fans had been fitted during roof slab construction or even later.

A review meeting was held on the ongoing works, cases of pending final instalment, and completion certificates that have yet to be furnished. The Secretary, Planning made a presentation on the work done under NLCPR with considerable detail and photos which was commendable and was appreciated. Minutes are under preparation by the Secretary, Planning of the State and are yet to be received. However, some areas of significance are: the 13 cases in PWD and 3 in Education where UC is submitted and 3rd or 4th instalments were awaited, which DoNER (NLCPR) will verify. This includes the Secretariat and Legislature building which are nowhere near early completion. For the 205 projects sanctioned under NLCPR, 85 were stated to be completed and CC furnished for which a detailed statement was furnished and needs verification. There are evident gaps as was discovered later. For instance, the Tawang ropeway project is shown as completed but safety certificate is not available and the ropeway is not operable. The rural water supply projects are intended to be handed over to village communities who would collect charges and maintain them but no such arrangements have been done by the implementing agency.

The status of ongoing projects and of projects retained since 2005-06 was also furnished. In respect of the list of retained projects, it was clarified that this concept was given up from this year and only those projects for which DPR in full shape had been furnished by November 2014 would be considered while those DPRs which were older and needed revisions based on new SSR/SOR would be accepted after revision. All others would be integrated with the priority list for the current year and only a reserve maintained in case a project was dropped. For one project for a landing ground at Yingkiong, the State Government has diverted the funds to the Secretariat building and needs to be tallied with NLCPR sanctions and files. A review was made of the ongoing projects sanctioned long back and the State Government was urged to verify actual status and complete the projects. For the Shanti Deva Vidyalaya, Bomdila, only first instalment had been taken but 95% completion is asserted. No progress has been made for the quarters which are quite obviously essential for such remote areas where proper rental housing would be unavailable. The Bameng to Lada road approved in 2005-06 for Rs 8.902 crores and funded Rs 7.778 crores is now stated to be handed over



for PMGSY which makes it an ineligible category for NLCPR. Further, it was mentioned that all the work done for 40 km was on earthwork which brings it into the dubious category. An investigation is necessary. It was observed that even Bailey bridges which are set up as emergency interventions were not complete even after 6-7 years but it was learnt that some have been converted to RCC bridges and the officers assured completion of the rest. Verification and report of the nature of institutions – public or private/trusts called JNK school/hostel building in Papum Pare district was also requested. The status of Steel suspension bridge at Siyum over the Upper Subansiri river sanctioned for Rs 13.08 crores in 2005-06 was also requested. It was also observed that reconstruction activities could not be taken up under NLCPR or by NEC. Details of rate per square feet for the Yatri Niwas completed in Anjaw district was also requested. A major complaints made by State officials was that over the last year and a half many requests for fund release had been returned with piecemeal queries in the Ministry of DoNER. Secretary asked for specific details that would be inquired.

The status of works under NEC were also briefly discussed. Some of the items were proposed for visit in relation to proposed tour of Secretary. In respect of agriculture related grants, there was no clarity on whether an overall concept was in place whether it was for alternative models for jhumming or for orange cultivation, etc. NEC needs to take a policy approach to these areas since farmers need backward and forward linkages and any programme in isolation will be a failure and may only lend itself to misuse and misappropriation.

Meeting with the Hon'ble Governor of Arunachal Pradesh: Called on the Hon'ble Governor by prior appointment. He emphasised the need for air connectivity from the capital of the State, Itanagar, to New Delhi, if needed for capacity purposes, via Guwahati. I appreciated his interest and said that these would be placed before a meeting to be convened shortly. I also expressed to him my concern that people and businessmen were travelling from Guwahati to Itanagar by road and suggested that the State could also consider how the rail option could be made faster and with more scheduled trains every day to match business and air needs so that Itanagar could be reached quickly and without any anxiety on cancelled schedules such as those in airlines.

Later, over dinner hosted by the Hon'ble Chief Minister, he emphasised the need for rapid development of infrastructure in the State and support for this purpose by the Ministry. I assured him of our prompt response and also on the proposed changes in regards to use of common software, electronic communication of DPR, use of email and SMS alert systems for queries, and alteration of project approval periods to synchronise with the weather patterns for work. Minister, Rural Works Dept gave a slip requesting consideration of a Water Supply Project of Rs 13 crores for Bameng township which had been retained in 2013 and DPR had been furnished. I requested him to suitably advise the RC and we would pursue the matter in parallel to trace the record. This request reinforces the high requirement of water supply schemes in Arunachal Pradesh and the North East.

3rd February 2015: Proceeded to Ziro, Lower Subansiri district and back.

Enroute, inspected Soochna Bhawan at Naharlagun which is under construction. For over a year, it was reported, centering had been put in place in the second floor and roof could not be laid because of lack of further instalments. Despite UC being given, piecemeal queries had been raised in the Ministry, it was stated and no release had been made after 16.3.2011. I assured them that the Ministry would facilitate their tasks.

The road to Ziro is part of the trans-Arunachal road which is being taken up for upgradation by BRO. The work is proceeding slowly. An interesting aspect that is relevant for improving local



engineering and vendor capacity is that the road is using Water Mixed Macadam (WMM) technology which will increase the life of roads at slightly higher cost. A comparative analysis is being done in the Ministry of these options for further discussions with MoRTH and CRRl.

Inspected the Water Supply scheme (One MLD) at Yupia, Papum Pare district enroute. The 2nd instalment was received after a delay of 3 years in September 2014. I urged early completion and to tie up local community management of the scheme by collection of water charges from users. A problem raised here as in other places was that since the pipeline had to pass through private land, the owner gave permission subject to his being allowed to take up the pillar support construction for the pipe portions that pass through his lands. The department could give a separate contract for these works since NLCPR requires turnkey arrangements generally and copies of work orders. The simpler step would be for the turnkey operator to give sub contracts to these persons and not complicate the issue. The State Government may consider such a process instead.

Visited NEEPCO's run-of-the-river hydropower station at Ranganadi Stage I of 405 MW which is in operation from 2002. Also saw the barrage from an observation point off the road enroute to Ziro.

Inspected part of the road built from 80 km point on Kimin Ziro BRTF road to KVK at Yachuli followed by inspection of the Water Supply Scheme of 0.6 MLD. The road is pending completion and the State has requested release of the final instalment which may be examined. In respect of the WS project, UC has been submitted in June 2014 and the request needs urgent examination for early completion.

MLA, Ziro met me at this stage and complained about the delayed programme. After he learnt about the intermediate stops and given the road condition, he accompanied me for the rest of the inspection. He emphasised the need for rain water harvesting in the Ziro valley because during the dry season, there was a serious drinking water shortage. He also suggested that a water supply scheme be developed from a nearby river for the town since it was a major tourist destination. I explained to him that rainwater harvesting in this area could be considered by converging some watershed development programmes and this could be formulated and proposed to the Department of Land Resources. Further, I requested the State Government officers to examine the water supply scheme for Ziro since Drinking water supply was a priority for Government of India.

On arrival at Ziro, passed the airport. During my brief stop, Shri Chatung, Apatani Youth Association requested upgradation and provision of civil airport facilities at the present Ziro airport. Work was already ongoing at the airport but a civilian enclave was missing.

Proceeded to a farmer's plot to appreciate the infrastructure required for Kiwi farming. T-shaped RCC pillars are fabricated and placed on the field at intervals and GI wires passed across the 3 metre space to hold branches of Kiwi plant which has been placed one per pillar. The arrangement is quite costly and the farmer has to wait for four years for the fruits. Protocols for planting and seedlings are being provided by the departments but given the cost of about Rs 15 lakhs per ha, as stated, it would be difficult to fund it in the manner that NEC has done in this case. NEC is advised to build replicable models and not reduce the programme to a selective aid plan that will make people seek to corner the funds. Perhaps, in the organic farming scheme, a system could be evolved to bring in 10 ares per farmer in stages so that they can build their coverage over several years with a bearable burden and then repay from the fourth year so that other farmers can use the revolving capital fund. NEC may examine the scope for more innovative financing methods.



Inspected the Piggery Unit funded by NEC. This is titled Strengthening and expansion of Pig Breeding Farm at Ziro for 3.76 crores in 23.11.2012. The unit with a Veterinarian in charge had about four sows and had put up a series of sheds for sows. They wanted more money to set up a shed for boars so that multiplication could be done and piglets distributed cheaply to villagers. I enquired if there was any technology or protocol for developing frozen semen straws for pigs which was confirmed by the Vet. In such a case, I asked why this proposal had been made since it was far easier and more effective to keep FS straws and distribute to villages for insemination through a trained villager. This method had proved successful over four decades for cattle and need not have been deviated in such a crude manner for this project. I said and later issued instructions to NEC to keep further funding on hold for this project.

Inspected the biotech centre scheme funded by NEC and titled, Establishment of Biotechnology Training and Development Centre at Ziro for Rs 358.60 lakhs. Since the road access was cut and the sun had nearly set, the available structures were seen. A barbed wire compound wall has been put up around the land to protect from encroachment. Four quarters have been built for lower level staff. No other work has been done nor is there any idea of the concept or mechanism to be adopted for expanding the applications of biotechnology. I referred the officers to the example of the Orchid centre in Hengbung, Manipur which they could visit and that biotech needed an overall concept and study of application before the project could be taken up. Moreover, I enquired as to how they expected scientists to stay at such a remote location as now selected for which no reply was furnished. I asked them to consider visiting good tissue culture facilities and extension facilities in the country of relevance to the North East to learn from them.

4th February 2015

Travelled to Tawang by helicopter via Guwahati. I learnt later that the copter flew only four days a week on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and apart from missing the schedule on some days, they would consistently not run on Friday. This had killed tourist traffic. Since road conditions were extremely difficult, the road option was a worse choice. Further, after an accident had occurred at Tawang landing grounds, the DGCA had prescribed various measures and meanwhile, the LG had been shifted to Lumla, 1.5 hours away by road.

Conducted a brief review at DC headquarters, Tawang after presentation by the DC during which the Panchayat President was present. The lower literacy rate of the district and the poor options for students was highlighted. Hospital facilities were poor and no radiologist was available. The district was not connected to the grid and generation was much below needs which was especially felt during the evening hours. Mobile networks are poor because BSNL services are poor and Airtel is confined to district headquarters. The tourism sector had great potential especially for the locals who were especially hospitable. However, growth was hampered by access problems, costs, lack of copter landing grounds and wayside amenities and halting places from Guwahati to Tawang. Further, the sector was dominated by tour operators of Guwahati and locals needed to be encouraged and trained. He also suggested expedition of the hydroelectric projects. I affirmed all support and suggested that for education, tele-education could be considered and referred him to NESAC (I have discussed with Head, NESAC yesterday). This would also enable radiology training for a selected XII pass student and a sure job. For electric generation, I suggested the introduction of wind power that could be of small size and capacity and meet local needs effectively through the local grid since there clearly was adequate wind potential.

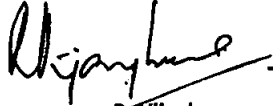


This was followed by a run through the town in which road improvement had been funded by NLCPR and visit to the Monastery, the largest in India and second largest after Lhasa, Tibet. The Abbot wanted our assistance to enable Buddhist students to get scholarship since the State Government had little to set aside. I said that the Ministry would take up the issue with the Ministry of Minority Affairs which should support such categories. As I returned, saw the Ropeway from outside. This system has not yet got a safety certificate and cannot, therefore, be used. I requested the DC to verify the antecedents of the contractor, Damodar Ropeway, before beginning operations since they would have set up such ropeways elsewhere. I also visited the High Altitude Sports Complex in the town which is under construction with NLCPR support (one instalment). This could be a showpiece for the Government of India. At the moment, the work is halted for lack of funds to be released by Ministry of DoNER and this may be immediately examined since it is also to be used for a religious reception for the Dalai Lama in October this year. The project does not seem to have provided for developing the central ground which is dusty and not suited for track events. This aspect may also be examined and a model ground developed for the isolated region.

5th February 2015 (Shri Pathak returned by road to Guwahati from this stage)

Visited Bum La border post. Access road is being repaired by BRO but progress is very slow. Further, a portion is stated to be beyond the scope of BRO for unclear reasons and will need to be clarified by the Defence and Home Ministries. Another aspect that is derived from discussions is the extremely poor and condemnable treatment by BRO and by their contractors of their workers who are not provided with adequate warm clothes. A connected aspect is that these workers are left to cut trees in their neighbourhood, which is simply bad. During discussions, it was also learnt that the State Government has asked for a deposit to provide an electric line to the border post and this would need to be examined and sorted out by the officers concerned.

Returned to Lumla via the Circuit House, Tawang and left for Guwahati and then to New Delhi.


R. Vijaykumar
Secretary, Ministry of DoNER.
New Delhi

February 13, 2015