

Visit Notes on tour to Meghalaya

Toured Meghalaya State from 19-23 August 2015. While passing through Guwahati, held discussions with officials of NE Railways on the status of the Akhaura project and other plans. The Akhaura project is now with the Ministry of External Affairs who will be proposing a note on funding both land and infrastructure. I reiterated my suggestion that the Sittwe port connectivity by rail and road on unimodal basis with a branch line/road east to the rail lines and roadways to Yangon and to Thailand would be much more relevant to the country and give better access to markets in these countries in a two-way trade. There is also a need to introduce better and more rail services within the North East. Mr Harpal Singh mentioned that some surveys had been conducted in various sectors. I advised him to consider reviving the abandoned rail line from Simalguri and take it to Mon town and to also consider a line from Mariani to Mokokchung and thence to Tuensang for enabling both farm cargo and passenger movement and to alter the profile of these backward segments of Nagaland.

Arrived at Shillong and reviewed the activities of NEC. Minutes will be prepared by Secretary i/c, NEC. However, there is little relevance and contribution by the Advisers and Consultants in NEC to the promotion of its charter or to the benefit of the States. There is evidently a need for major reconstruction of the NEC and to get rid of staff who have long since outlived their utility, if they had any to begin with. In particular, there is a need to develop guidelines for approval of projects in NEC out of the funds granted to it which are in conformity with the NLCPR guidelines with some small alterations to suit the guidelines to the natural focus of NEC on livelihood issues that are closer to States and to develop pilot projects that can later be incorporated in national or state policies. Moreover, these guidelines should receive approvals of the Ministry rather than the NEC plenary, which had hardly any time to discuss the agenda after the Governors and Chief Ministers had expressed their views. This is more relevant because it is the Ministry which releases funds to the NEC and is accountable to Parliament for the expenditure and projects funded. In referring to the action taken report submitted recently by NEC to the Chairman, it was observed that the comments were fatuous and did not show any focus or drive to achieve results. There was also an urgent need to fulfil NEC's regional planning role and the initiatives taken by DoNER should be completed in consultation with States. Now that three IAS officers were posted in the Ministry, this job for all Ministries of GOI excluding major infrastructure Ministries should be got completed while they are available.

On 20th August, visited Mawlynnong village, the cleanest village in Asia and the living bridge (root) at this village. Later, inspected the Lynghat-Dawki road funded under NLCPR and which includes four bridges. Visited the Dawki checkpost where the new Integrated Check Post is now proposed for construction. Later, visited Jowai and interacted with farmers/fishers who had gone to Kakinada for a training in

improved methods for smoking fish. Suggested that the DC/DM could develop an end-to-end plan that could capture niche markets and seek a high price for the smoked fish. The scheme has been taken up under the State's livelihood mission.

On 21st August, visited the Radar station of the North Eastern Air Command. Proceeded to visit and discuss issues and problems of NEIGRIHMS. Visited North Eastern Hill University and had discussions with the VC and Professors. The University clearly needs to develop a focus on agriculture or horticulture toward helping farmers by active involvement in the field. Toured the campus which is large and well spread out for their expansion plans.

Conducted a discussion with officers of the Planning department and selected departments of the Meghalaya State on the guidelines for NLCPR and particularly on the Ministry's plans for organic farming and animal husbandry development.

Visited the Don Bosco tribal museum in Shillong. Was surprised to learn that the NEC had funded the food gallery cum restaurant in the Museum which is not its charter. Secretary, NEC will need to inquire and send a detailed report.

On 22nd August, visited the RK Mission School complex funded by NLCPR in 2004. The building is complete except for glass windows in the ground floor corridor. It was learnt that the last instalment was yet to be paid to the institution and we may pursue with the State Government. Later, visited the Sacred Grove of the Khasis at Mawphiang. Visited the dam site and water treatment facilities of the PHE Department at Umiew dam and Mawphiang village which supplies water to Shillong. It appears that only a fifth of the costs of pumping and maintenance is being recovered from consumers, which is clearly low. Perhaps, along with increase of rates, there could be some plans developed for reusing and recycling water including after treatment, especially during the dry months. This step would perhaps also reduce the need for pumping huge quantities of water and it could serve a larger population.

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Secretary, DoNER