

ADDRESS

OF

**SHRI DORJEE KHANDU
CHIEF MINISTER, ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

AT

THE MEETING

ON

LOOK – EAST POLICY

WITH

*CHIEF MINISTERS OF
NORTHEASTERN STATES*

NEW DELHI
31ST OCTOBER 2007

Hon'ble Union External Affairs Minister, Shri Pranab Mukherjee Ji,
Hon'ble Minister DoNER, Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar Ji,
Hon'ble Union Ministers,
Hon'ble Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission,
My Esteemed Chief Minister, Colleagues of Northeastern States,
Secretary DoNER,
Ladies & Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to commend the efforts of Hon'ble Union Minister of DoNER Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar Ji for identifying the problems of Northeast Region borne out of its isolation and lack of infrastructure and his untiring efforts to resolve them. This meeting on "Look East Policy", which has been in existence for over a decade but having given no benefit to the Region so far, is a welcome step and demonstrates sincerity of the present Union Government. We are grateful to Hon'ble External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee ji for emphasizing the need of conducive foreign policy for economic growth of NE States.

2. Arunachal Pradesh is a mountainous, frontier and the biggest state of the North east India area-wise. It has long international boundary with Bhutan (160 Km), China (1080 Km) and Myanmar (540 Km) with whom, admittedly, we have had somewhat strained relations. The State has no air and rail connectivity. Mobile telephone service which was introduced in my State in the recent past is also woeful. It is high time that the said policy is reviewed to replace it by a result oriented concrete policy document. By now it is clear to all of us that lack of proper air and rail connectivity, telecommunication facility, basic infrastructure and above all the poor perception of internal security in the Region is a big dampener on investment by potential investors. We have to address all of these issues categorically while reviewing the policy on "Look East". It is in this context that I view this meeting as a welcome step and would like to thank Hon'ble Minister External Affairs and Hon'ble Minister DoNER for their initiative.

3. The Government of Arunachal Pradesh has been emphasizing the need for re-opening and re-establishing of ancient border trade links with countries like Myanmar, Bhutan and China. From time immemorial, the people of Arunachal Pradesh living in border areas have had trade relations with the people across the borders and even today informal trade through Pangsua-Pass (Indo-Myanmar) and Bleeting & Dongshengmang (Indo-Bhutan) are taking place. Arunachal Pradesh is one of the mega biodiversity hotspots of the world and with its given natural beauty it also has the potential of becoming one of the hotspots of nature tourism. If supporting infrastructure is put in place, internal security of the Northeast Region and its relations with bordering countries are improved and proper trade corridors are created, the entire Northeast Region will turn itself into a hub of commercial activities.

The Government of Arunachal Pradesh has proposed the following border trade points/centers

1. Pangsus Pass (Nampong) in Changlang district (Indo-Myanmar border).
2. Bleeting (Namstering)/Dongshengmang in Tawang district (Indo-Bhutan border).
3. Kenzamani (Zemithang) in Tawang-district (Indo-China border).
4. Bumla in Tawang district (Indo-China).
5. Gelling (Kepangla Pass) in Upper Siang District (Indo-China border).
6. Kibithoo in Anjaw district (Indo-China border).
7. Mechuka (Lolla Pass) and Monigong (Dumla Pass) in West Siang District (Indo-China border).
8. Taksing in Upper Subansiri district (Indo-China).

4. Most of these trade routes have already been inspected by the DGFT and the Customs. We would appreciate if a decision of finalizing the opening of the proposed trade routes is expedited.

5. All our efforts to facilitate the potential traders and tourists are stonewalled by the prevailing provisions of law under which entry into the State is restricted by virtue of my State being declared as Protected Area. In the recent past, my government had initiated proposals liberalize existing restrictions. We had written to the Government of India to extend tourist circuits and allow new circuits to cover all the district. Owing to the time taken for accessibility to most circuits, it was also proposed to allow international travelers to remain in the State beyond 10 days as currently prevailing. Further, to encourage international travelers, my government had also proposed that the restriction for traveling in a group may also be lifted. Government of India has a better perception of the geo-political situation vis-à-vis the north-east and therefore it should come out with clear cut guidelines on these issues. If the said restrictions are not lifted, our initiative to transform the economy of north-east region by creating conducive conditions for commercial activities shall remain a pipe dream.

6. While we join the rest of the country in celebrating the turn around of the Railways, we rue the fact that Arunachal Pradesh is yet to have rail connectivity.

7. I would like to reiterate our long pending demand of extension of Railway link from Ledo/Lekhapani in Assam to Nampong via Jairampur in Arunachal Pradesh. Jairampur is the Sub-divisional HQ of Changlang District, which is bestowed with plenty of natural resources. Coal, Oil and Plywood are the main produce of the area which are marketed and transported by road or brought to the nearest railhead about 40 km away at Ledo/Lekhapani in Assam. The area also yields considerable quantity of surplus agricultural produce. But in absence of cheap mode of transport like Railways, farmers of Changlang District are deprived of remunerative price for their produce. Besides, the area has many favoured tourist destinations like Namdapha National Park, frequently visited by tourists from foreign countries and Parasuram Kund, a holy "kund " visited by pilgrims from as far places as Nepal.

8. Changlang District though abundantly resource rich, inhabitants are income poor. Because absence of rail link to the area does not allow its resources to be converted into goods and services effectively.

9. Kindly help Arunachal Pradesh in overcoming its communication bottleneck by establishing rail link at least in Changlang District to pave the way for economic development of the area.

10. I may mention here that in response to the letter of Speaker, Arunachal Pradesh State Assembly, who hails from Changlang District, Hon'ble Minister of State for Railways, Government of India vide his letter N. 2007/W-1/NL/NF/8656 dated 25th July, 2007 informed him that Railway would be requiring about Rs. 60,000 Crores to complete the projects already on anvil and finding it difficult to meet up the requirement.

11. You would appreciate that linking a distance of about 40 km. by rail between Ledo/Lekhapani in Assam and Nampong via Jairampur in Arunachal Pradesh would be requiring small amount of fund but the benefits that would accrue to the people of Changlang District would be huge.

12. In case the Ministry of Railways is not in a position to fund the Ledo/Lekhapani-Nampong Rail Project, I would request DoNER to find a way out for funding this important project.

13. The “Look East” policy, *inter alia*, aims at restoring road and air connectivity between the north-east India with its neighbors in south-east Asia namely Bhutan, Myanmar, China, Thailand, Singapore etc. It is worth recalling that the famous Stilwell road existed in ancient times connecting north-east region of India with Myanmar through Kunming in Yunnan Province of China. This road had established trade linkage between the countries.

14. The Govt. of India has taken some initiative in improving the road connectivity on Stilwell road from Ledo in Assam to Pangsau Pass on the Indo-Myanmar border. But the efforts are not adequate.

15. The road connectivity as proposed above will lead to a boom in trade, commerce and marketing of goods of merchandise. In addition to this Arunachal Pradesh would also benefit from Myanmar with resources such as timber, stones, gems, jade and it will lead to employment generation in both the countries. Various items like coal and power may be traded besides cereals and other consumer goods.

16. During his visit to Along at the time of the Siang Festival, Shri Jairam Ramesh, Hon’ble Minister of State for Commerce had assured that concrete steps would be taken to operationalize the “Look-East” policy. In the background of above, I would request DoNER kindly to take up the matter with Government of India for early operationlization of the “Look-East” policy so that the north-east may benefit from the south and south-east Asia.

17. I hope this meeting will pave the way in finding pragmatic solutions to overcome the difficulties being faced by the north-east in its quest to reap the benefits as envisaged in the look east policy.

THANK YOU