

TOUR REPORT

TRIPURA - 5TH - 7TH MAY 2004

(I) NEC PROJECTS

NEC has supported Projects in different sectors in Tripura with an investment of Rs.344.92 crore since inception, till the end of the IXth Plan. This represents 6.10% of the investment in the North Eastern States by NEC. The sectors range from Agriculture, Horticulture, Fisheries, Animal Husbandry, Forest, Roads, Power, Health, Industries to Sports etc. The largest investment has been in the Power (Rs.9536.31 lakhs) and Roads (Rs.10033.76 lakhs) sectors. Funds directly released to the State have been Rs.60.57 crore in 2002-3 and Rs.26.81 crore in 2003-2004.

A detailed Review Meeting, with the Departmental Heads was taken, where progress of each NEC supported Project was assessed. Because of the very late release of funds by NEC (in the last with week of March'04) the utilisation has not been satisfactory in the last financial year. This was related to the budgetary cut imposed on NEC and its restoration in March'04, after intervention at the highest level.

Apart from sector-specific particulars, problems common to all Projects came up for discussions. These, inter-alia, had to do with inadequate systems of planning and project formulation, delayed processing of Project-related documents at the NEC Sectt., including clearance of Xth Plan Projects (49 Projects at an estimated cost of Rs.245 crore are awaiting a green-signal, since 2002-3), poor information sharing, un systematic fund-release by NEC Sectt., delays in passing on of funds by the State Finance Dept. to Implementing Agencies, non-adherence to standard Project Management techniques, resulting in time and cost overruns and non-institutionalising of rigorous concurrent monitoring mechanisms etc.

It was thereafter agreed after that the Planning and Development Department would conduct a stock-taking exercise and evolve appropriate systems to address these problems. The objectives would be to assign completion dates for all on-going Projects, ensure their 'quality' implementation and early flow of benefits to the target groups. For the future, the State may like to focus on larger Projects with a visible and demonstrable impact

Reservations were also expressed about withdrawal of the popular Schemes e.g. Academic Fellowships by NEC and diversion of these funds to the ITFT, Chandigarh. It was further apprehended that consequent on amendment of the Act, Tripura would be deprived, as it would not be able to participate in Regional Projects because of its inherent locational disadvantage.

It was clarified that NEC had withdrawn the Academic Fellowship Scheme on the basis of a Council resolution in 2003 and that a broad based system of open-tenders would now be followed for by NEC on selecting Institutions other than ITFT Chandigarh in the Training-cum-Employment

Programme. None of the States would “lose” under NEC’s new mandate as their development was originally linked to that of the Region. Projects would need to be conceptualised suitably. If needed, the State could request for a special discussion on these aspects at the next Council Meeting.

The following NEC Projects/Institutions were visited. The outstanding issues pertaining to them are highlighted.

(a) **REGIONAL INSTITUTE OF PHARMACEUTICAL SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, (RIPSAT)AGARTALA:**

The Institute was set up in the 6th Plan period (1979) by NEC to cater to the need for qualified Pharmacists in the Region. It conducts Diploma and Degree Courses. The capacity is 60 and 30 respectively, for the Courses, with reserved seats for Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland and Meghalaya.

14 out of 23 Teaching Posts are lying vacant. The senior most Assistant Professor has been acting as Principal I/C since 1994. The State Government, which provides all the recurring expenses of the Institute is seized of the matter and assured that suitable action is being taken up in this regard.

Pro-rata contribution is raised from participating States. An amount of Rs. 23 lakhs is pending from Govt. of Assam since 1997. Apparently follow-up at different levels, has not yielded any results. The State Government was urged to follow-up the matter again.

All the capital expenditure of the Institute is borne by NEC. During the IXth Plan an upgradation Project was approved (1997-98) for Rs.334.67 lakhs for construction work (Office Buildings, Hostels, Residential accommodation, boundary wall etc.) and purchase of equipment, Lab apparatus, books/journals etc. The total expenditure till March 2004 is Rs.232.94 lakhs. Reportedly, the delay in construction work was because the technical clearance of the Project at NEC Sectt. took two years and was received only in January 2003. However, thereafter the PWD have also not been very prompt in implementing the works. Those relating to Staff Quarters & Girl’s Hostel have not been taken up yet. The new Administrative Building has not been furnished and occupied. 30% of the boundary wall and the Boys’ Hostel have yet to be completed. The existing buildings appeared in need of maintenance, though it was submitted that additions and alterations had been effected to them. Some of the equipment bought are still to be made operational. It was assured that these pending items of works would be taken in hand expeditiously.

For the Xth Plan, NEC has provided Rs.100 lakhs of the approved Rs.170 lakhs, on 1st March’04 for effecting improvement in the Laboratories and Tool Rooms and setting up of a Research Development Unit for Indigenous Plants. However, the funds are yet to be passed on by the State Finance Department. This is expected by the month-end.

The Institute is under the administrative supervision of the State Department of Health and its Governing Body is headed by the Health Minister, Govt. of Tripura. It appears that the Institute has not set itself clear goals for the future, in particular to leverage its strength in a growth-sector of pharmaceuticals or to attain higher academic and research standards and move towards self-sufficiency. NEC Sectt., which does not have a full-time Health Adviser has perhaps not been able to provide significant inputs or guidance in these areas.

(b) **DIABETES RESEARCH CENTRE, G.B. PANT HOSPITAL, AGARTALA.**

NEC approved during the IXth Plan (1999-2000), the setting up of the Centre at a cost of Rs.50 lakhs and released the entire amount. Rs.35.16 lakhs have been utilized so far. The building has been completed, after some delay. However, seepage has already occurred and glass panes broken. The machinery and equipment are yet to be purchased. Furniture is lying stacked in one room for the last one year and become rusty and deshaped. There has been no deployment of Medical staff for the Centre, to make it fully functional and neither have preparatory training activities been taken up. Only OPD facility, on a small scale, is functioning from August 2003.

Interestingly, in the Xth Plan, NEC has approved another Rs.45 lakhs for the upgradation of the Centre and has also released the funds in March 2004. Work is proposed to start on adding another two floors of the Centre, when it has not even started functioning, nor has a date been fixed for this.

The Health Department has been advised to look into the matter so that infructuous expenditure does not take place.

(c) **LATEX CENTRIFUGING FACTORY & CREPE MILL, TAKMACHERRA (SOUTH DISTRICT)**

These were set up with NEC assistance in 1992. Under the IXth Plan, NEC approved in 1997-98, capacity expansion for processing of field rubber latex from 5000 Kg to 10,000 Kg per day for the Centrifuging Factory and conversion to value added CENEX CREPE rubber from 500 Kg to 1000 Kg per day for the Crepe Mill, at a cost of Rs.153 lakhs. The Project was implemented by the Tripura Forest Development and Plantation Corporation under the guidance of the Rubber Board.

The entire amount from NEC has been utilized. However, the commissioning of the expanded Crepe Mill is expected within a month, on operationalising of installed equipment by provision of electrical

connections. The equipment is stated to have taken a year to arrive by road from Kerala and hence looks rather old and rusted.

What stood out during the visit was the scope to improve the ambience and working conditions of the employees, who were exposed to various chemicals/gases and worked without masks, gloves and boots. The Management agreed to take remedial action.

(d) **PROCESS-CUM-PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT CENTRE, ANANDNAGAR**

In order to promote setting-up of rubber based industrial units by prospective entrepreneurs, NEC funded the Centre under the IXth Plan in 1997-98 at an approved cost of Rs.126 lakhs, to be implemented by the Tripura Forest Development and Plantation Corporation. Funds were released from 2000-2001. Out of the total, Rs.112.69 lakhs have been spent till 2003-4.

All the civil construction work is over. However, the quality of construction by NBCC does not appear to be very satisfactory. The machinery, procured under the guidance of the Rubber Board, appears battered and outdated. Costly Testing Equipment has been kept without air-conditioning, compromising quality and longevity. Some more equipment is yet to arrive. After trial run of the machines by the Rubber Board, the Centre is expected to be functional by June 2004.

Considering that this Centre has been planned to play a key role in developing the rubber sector in the State it was disappointing to note that no clear plans had been drawn up for conducting training programmes at the Centre or running it as a Testing Centre. In fact its location appeared inappropriate, as it was not well connected by public transport. The reason for its selection appears to be proximity to a Diosgenin extraction plant of TFDPC, also set up with financial assistance from NEC. Apparently, the Project was initially conceived by the Department of Industries and then handed over to TFDPC for implementation. It has yet to be decided whose responsibility the Centre will now be. The State Govt. has promised to resolve this issue, though it would prefer Rubber Board to take it over. The latter, it is learnt, has declined. Incidentally, the State does not have a single Rubber Technologist on its rolls, despite being second in the country in the sector.

(e) **BARAMURA GAS THERMAL POWER STATION (1 X 21 MW)**

The Rs. 95.36 crore Project has been funded by NEC. The Project was commissioned in record time - the only one in NEC's portfolio to date. Work commenced in March 2001 and was formally inaugurated in November 2002.

Commercial run began in December 2002. Rs.9.6 crore were released in 2003-04 by way of final instalment by NEC.

Power evacuation is through 66 kv S/S Agartala - Baramura and Baramura - Teliamura Transmission Lines. 50% of the power is to be utilized by Tripura and the balance shared with Manipur and Mizoram respectively. However, MOAs with the two States are yet to be finalised.

Power generated is 190.66 MU till end April '04, at a PLF of 75.81% Cost of generation is Rs. 2.22 per unit. The Unit appeared to be functioning well and is operating at break - even point.

The Unit is under the State Department of Power. It has handed in another proposal for a second unit of 21 MW to NEC at a cost of Rs. 90 crore. The EFC Memo and DPR have been with NEC Sectt. since a month. The Project has been cleared by the Planning Commission. On receipt of these documents, Dept. of DONER will arrange for early clearances.

Other problems such as flaring of gas, inadequate connectivity to the Eastern Grid and non-payment of Rs. 20 crore by Govt. of Mizoram for power shared from Units V & VI of Rokhia Gas Based Power Station, were brought up. State Govt. was advised to take them up formally at the appropriate level with Power Ministry and Govt. of Mizoram.

(II) CAPACITY BUILDING:

Discussions were held with the concerned Departmental Heads on proposals submitted to the Dept. of DONER for funding under its Plan Scheme of Capacity Building. It was agreed to modify them in line with the decisions taken. The proposals related to the following categories.

- Panchayati Raj members and office bearers (Elections are due in July 2004).
- Tripura Autonomous District Council Members and officials.
- Medical Officers / Superintendents of Govt. Hospitals.

It may be mentioned that the State has been nominating its officers regularly for Training Programmes sponsored by the Department of DONER. There are some problems relating to reimbursement of TA/DA claims, which are being looked into.

The DG Police sought to know if rehabilitation of categories such as surrendered outlawed groups could be covered under this Plan Scheme. On 6th May 2004, a group of 72 NLFT Cadres has come over ground, including 22 women. He was requested to send a formal proposal for examination.

(III) BAMBOO SECTOR

Tripura was the first State in the country to have announced a Bamboo Policy in 2001. It envisages growth of the sector through a market led, community based conservation and utilization of the resource in forest and farm areas.

INBAR (International Network of Bamboo & Rattan) has helped establish an INBAR - Tripura Bamboo Mission to develop an integrated Project, with a holistic perspective.

In this backdrop, consultations were held with the Chief Conservator of Forests and his colleagues as well as Secretary, Industries Department, on the proposed NEC Project for UNIDO assistance to promote the development of the bamboo sector in the Region. It was agreed that the State Govt's suggestions on essential components of such an externally aided Project, based on its experience, would be submitted to the Dept. of DONER within a week.

NEC has set up a Task Force on Development of the Bamboo Sector but Tripura has statedly not been nominated as a Member nor has it attended any of its meetings. The Planning Secretary was asked to take this up with the NEC Sectt. NEC Sectt. has released Rs. 25 lakh in March 2004 to the State for extension of Bamboo Plantations. Work has not yet been taken up. The model proposed to be adopted was seen at the SEPAHIJHALA Plantation, which is being implemented, through community participation.

In the development of cane and bamboo handicrafts, Tripura has made impressive headway, with support from NEC and more notably Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts, under the Ministry of Textiles, which helps develop new designs and facilitates sales in niche overseas markets. The quality of craftsmanship of the State's artisans has come in for special acclaim. However, suitable technological upgradation and support systems are required to achieve volumes of quality products, as was evidenced during a visit to an artisan cluster at NALCHAR.

Sd/-11.5.04
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