

## **THE GOVERNOR OF TRIPURA ( SHRI TATHAGATA ROY) :**

Hon. President, Sir, Hon. Vice President, Hon. Union Home Minister, fellow Governors, Lieutenant Governors, Senior Officers, Ladies and Gentlemen, at the outset, I express my gratitude to the Hon'ble President of India for convening this Conference and for giving me an opportunity to present the specific issues related to the State of Tripura before this august gathering.

Tripura is a small State, the third smallest in the country, with a very small population of 37 lakhs and with a lot of hills and forests. The State is proud to have an overall literacy of 96.82 per cent. The people of the State could be divided into two parts – about 68 percent are refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan, while the remaining 32 per cent are Scheduled Tribes, many of whom speak a tribal tongue called Kokborok. Otherwise, Bengali is widely spoken in the State. English and Hindi are also understood.

Sir, any discussion on the State of Tripura would first require a short description of its geographical isolation from the rest of India. This geographical isolation has been a bane of the State, and all the problems of this State can be traced to this isolation. This isolation was an unfortunate sequel to the partition of Bengal in 1947. Following the partition, Tripura which was a Princely State in British India, became a projection of Indian territory into Bangladesh, so much so that out of 1018 kilometres of the total borders of the State, more than 80 percent, that is

856 kilometres, is international border with Bangladesh. Its border with India is confined to Assam and Mizoram. The border with Mizoram, of 109 kilometres, is hilly and difficult to negotiate. It is only through the 53 kilometres of the border with Assam, more specifically Barak Valley, that the State is connected to the rest of India. The development of the State is, therefore, intimately associated with this connection and also with the relation between our country and Bangladesh.

Now, coming to the question of Security, internal and external, Sir, during the British period, as I said, Tripura was a Princely State adjacent to certain Districts of undivided Bengal and Assam. Almost the entire expanse of these districts became part of erstwhile East Pakistan after partition. However, a small part of the erstwhile Sylhet district of Assam became part of India and the State of Assam. Passage over land from Tripura to the rest of India is only through this narrow bit of Assam.

Following partition, there was widespread and brutal persecution of Hindus and other minorities in Pakistani regime, as a result of which a large number of Hindu refugees from the adjacent Districts entered Tripura. Even after liberation of Bangladesh this persecution has not completely stopped. Before partition the State was populated mainly by some 19 tribes with a relatively small number of Bengalis. The rulers of the State also belonged to one such tribe. Following partition and the consequent massive refugee movement, however, the ethnic proportion of the State reversed and the Bengalis became majority. As a result of this reversal of this ethnic position there had been ethnic tension in the State and a bloody insurgency

beginning in late 1970s and reaching a peak in 1980 had happened. The number of people killed in the ethnic massacre was in the range of 250-500 mostly in the rural areas. Insurgency following this massacre continued until the early years of this century, but has now almost abated and is existing only in certain corners of the State abutting Chittagong Hill Tracts. This containment of insurgency has not been only through a routine law and order exercise, although the deployment of para-military forces comprising both Central and State forces. Further, the State Government has been sensitive to tribal aspirations and has constituted the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council in which members are elected from among tribals only. Kokborok, the main language among the tribals, is given all encouragement and is taught in Universities up to Post Graduate level. The improvement of relations between India and Bangladesh brought about by the indefatigable efforts of the Hon'ble Prime Minister and that of Bangladesh has been a big factor in cooling down the insurgency. When the relations were not so cordial the insurgent groups often found refuge in Bangladeshi territory with or without the support of the Bangladeshi State. It is no longer so and the Bangladesh Government has proved its sincerity to help India in this regard by handing over terrorists living in that country. In fact, I recently met the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh at Dhaka when she was explicit in underlining the importance of cordial relation between the two countries, which is of particular importance to the State of Tripura. Tripura Government reports that there has been no extremist violence in the State during the year 2015 and the crime situation under

the heads of dacoity, burglary, murder, rioting and crimes against women have also sharply declined during the year. The State has undertaken several steps for modernisation of the State Police Force, including provision of a crime & criminal tracking net work system. In the past one year, the extremists could not commit any incident in Tripura due to the proactive and efficient counter-insurgency operations carried out by various Central and State security agencies. However, there have been one or two cases reported by an Organization called the “National Liberation Front of Tripura”, who are camping mostly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts areas of Indo Bangladesh border which is a very inaccessible place, highly forested, hilly, and there are reports of kidnapping and extortion in these places but not very frequent.

A lot of insurgents who were active until the middle of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have surrendered. But the surrender package extended to the cadres of the extremist groups was not sufficient to motivate or attract the potential returnees. The financial benefit received by the returnees in Tripura is less than the package offered in Manipur. Therefore, surrender package will need to be revised and the same may be kept, at least, similar to the package offered to the returnees in Manipur. I would request the Union Home Minister to give due consideration to this aspect.

On the question of creating jobs for youths, for Act East Policy, for Skill Development and “Make in India”, the problems, as I have mentioned, can all be traced to the lack of connectivity of the State. It is so

difficult to go to the State by land route that no industrialist can be persuaded to come here inspite of the fact that the State has some considerable assets. The State is rich in natural gas. It is the second largest producer of Rubber next to Kerala, though the rubber cultivation has been hit by low international prices of latex. It also produce very high quality of fruits, which could give rise to fruit-processing industries, but nothing has come up because of this connectivity problem.

One example would suffice. Tripura is ethnically, culturally and linguistically very much connected with West Bengal. Now, the distance between Agartala, the capital of Tripura and Kolkata, as the crow flies, is about 350 kms, whereas over land through India, it is 1,700 kms. This would give us some idea of what kinds of problems we come across when we try to persuade anyone to come to Tripura.

On the question Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Housing for All and Smart Cities, I have already made submission in the written note. I would not like to repeat them in view of the constraint of time. There certain other aspects, to which I would like to draw the kind attention of Hon'ble President, Hon'ble Vice-President and the Hon. Home Minister.

In order to improve the connectivity of the State, we require a few things. We require more flights because for most people, even for the lower middle-class people of Tripura, flying is the only way of getting out of Tripura. Now, we have only about seven flights between Agartala and Kolkata. Out of that, one is an Air India flight. The remaining private airline flights have a problem that they do not carry 'stretcher cases'. Now, the

stretcher cases are very important because the medical facilities in Tripura are not very advanced and the reason for that is that doctors cannot be persuaded to come to the State. So, everyone has to run to Kolkata and in order to do that bad cases which need stretcher, are very hard put because there is no facility offered except by Air India, and that too only on stretcher at a time.

Then, the broad gauge connection, which the Indian Railways have provided, which has already been effected up to Agartala, will be operational for passenger traffic very shortly. The Bus service from Kolkata to Agartala via Dhaka, which has started because of the efforts by the Prime Minister, has been a very big boon.

Now, before I finish, there are just two items to which I would like to draw the attention of the august gathering. One is that the road connection between Tripura and the rest of the country is from an inter-State border point of Churaibari to a place in Karimganj in Assam. This stretch is of no importance to Assam, but it is the life line of Tripura. And, this stretch of road is very often in a very bad state, as a result of which not only loss of equipment and vehicles takes place, but even loss of lives. I have already seen the Minister in charge of Road Transport and Highways and impressed upon him the necessity to improve this stretch of road. I have already spoken about broad gauge connection.

One other thing is regarding the quality in Higher Education in Tripura. Tripura has one Central University, one Private University and one State University which is in the process of being set up. It is called

Maharaja Bir Bikram University. Now in the Central University, as the Governor, I am the Chief Rector, but the duties of the Chief Rector are not defined with the result that the Vice Chancellor is pretty much free to do what he likes and there are reports that he does pretty much what he likes. Now some kind of supervision ought to be exercised. The only person who can supervise, who is above me is you, Sir, President of India, as the Visitor to the University. Now, with this vast country to govern, you certainly cannot be bothered about what is happening in a Central University in Tripura. So, I have only one submission that if the duties of the Chief Rector can be more explicit that it will make the administration of the University better.

With that, I conclude. Thank you very much Sir.