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Annexure-II

Opening Remarks by Shri K.C. Pant, Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission at the Tenth Meeting of the Island Development Authority (IDA) held on 19th January 2003 at Port Blair, Andaman & Nicobar Islands

The Prime Minister's presence at this meeting in Port Blair underlines his deep interest in the welfare of the people of Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadweep. The meeting will strengthen this important forum in advancing the policies and programmes for integrated and environmentally sound development of Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep Islands.

2. The Andaman & Nicobar and the Lakshadweep group of Islands occupy a unique place in the mosaic that is India. Nature has been bountiful in these islands. Marine and fishery resources are abundant but have yet to be fully tapped. A unique and unspoiled environment offers immense potential for high value tourism. These are the thrust sectors that can build upon natural endowments and strengths for bringing about employment generation as well as environmentally sustainable growth to the Islands. We will be taking up these and other important issues in the course of this Meeting.

3. At the same time, physical distance and lack of adequate connectivity has been a constraint on growth; more over it has tended to generate a feeling of psychological distance in the islanders. This has to be removed by better connectivity and strengthening of transport infrastructure and communications. Visible progress has taken place in recent years in improving connectivity and communication links with the rest of India.

4. Government of India has been giving special consideration to the problems of the far-flung areas of the country, and accordingly remains committed to supporting the development efforts of the Islands. The percentage of people below poverty line in the two groups of Islands are below the national average, and indices of social development compare well with those of the mainland. All these factors provide a good foundation for accelerating the pace of development during the Tenth Five Year Plan. A thrust to this effect has been given by providing significantly stepped up outlays to Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep, both as compared to the Ninth Plan and in relation to the Central Plan assistance given to other States and Union Territories.