

Annexure-III

Inaugural Address by Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the Tenth Meeting of the Island Development Authority (IDA) held on 19th January 2003 at Port Blair, A&N Islands

I am very pleased to be here with all of you for the Tenth Meeting of the Island Development Authority. This meeting is being held soon after the adoption of the Tenth Five Year Plan by the National Development Council last month. This is symbolic of the special attention that we are according to the development of our Islands as an integral part of India's all-sided development.

It is pleasing to know that the IDA is meeting again in Port Blair for the first time after its inaugural meeting in 1986. But it is not so pleasing to know that the IDA is meeting after a gap of nearly six years. I would like it to meet more regularly in the future. I am, however, happy to note from the address of the Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, who also chairs the Standing Committee of the IDA, that the Standing Committee has been meeting regularly.

The Islands of Andaman & Nicobar to our east and Lakshadweep to our west are a gift of nature to India. They are perfect manifestations of the infinite beauty and delicate balance, which Mother Nature strikes in her work. The lush green tropical rain forests housing priceless bio-resource; the many unique tribes who have inhabited these islands for ages; the treasure of living coral atolls that is one of the finest in the world; and the sea that reminds us of India's vastness as well as our geographical closeness to South-East Asia on the one hand and Africa on the other - all these features endear us to our Islands.

These natural strengths have to remain as the bedrock of development strategies for these Islands.

The Andaman & Nicobar Islands have an honoured place in the history of India's Freedom Movement. The Cellular Jail in Port Blair narrates the story of the immense sacrifices made by our indomitable freedom fighters. The names of Veer Savarkar, Bhai Paramanand, Mahaveer Singh and others, as also the countless unnamed patriots of India's First War of Independence, have made this place sacred for us. Today we also proudly recall that Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose unfurled the Tricolour here before it was raised on the mainland. We need to take more effective steps to make successive generations of Indians aware of this inspiring saga in Indian history.