

(35)

In post-Independence decades, Andaman & Nicobar Islands have become home to a vibrant and industrious community, reflecting the rich linguistic and religious diversity of our society. This too is something we cherish.

In recent times, the importance of these Islands in India's strategic matrix has grown considerably. Therefore, we have established a joint Tri Service Andaman & Nicobar Command, controlling the assets of the three Services and the Coast Guard. This is the first ever joint command in the country.

Because of their historic contribution, their ecological richness and fragility, and their distant but strategic location, we need to adopt a different approach for our Islands' development. The usual development plans for the mainland cannot be super-imposed on them. We have accordingly been encouraging innovative yet careful approaches for the development of these Islands, while keeping in mind the aspirations of islanders.

We need to always look at the problems in their totality, with rigorous and in-depth set of studies. In this context, I am pleased to note that the Planning Commission has taken up the task of preparing Development Reports for both Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep, with a view to setting out a medium-term perspective on holistic strategies for employment generation and accelerated development of the Islands.

While accelerating the pace of development, we need to be careful that we do not cause any irreversible damage to the unique, ecological and cultural heritage of these Islands. At the same time, clearly, we cannot allow these Islands being kept as 'hot house' specimens without allowing any constructive changes. It is the inherent right of every human being to seek a reasonable share in the fruits of civilization.

In this context, I would like to briefly share with you two thoughts. One, we need to evolve innovative and ecologically sustainable ways of promoting Island Tourism, for which there is an immense untapped potential both in Andaman & Nicobar Islands and in Lakshadweep. My recent visits to Bali and Maldives have convinced me that we need to learn from successful initiatives in this regard elsewhere in the world. We need to take effective steps to enable more and more mainland and foreign tourists, many of whom go to nearby destinations in South-East Asia, to come here.

Secondly, we should give greater thrust to such other economic activities, which will reduce the local people's dependence on government