

Speech for Hon'ble Minister (WR) for Meeting of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee of the Ministry of Water Resources to be held on 13th February, 2013 at Guwahati.

Hon'ble Members of the Committee, Dr. S.K. Sarkar, Secretary (WR) and other officers of the Ministry, it is our pleasure to be here today to discuss the important issue of flood management in the country. As you are aware, the Union and the State Governments regularly undertake measures to manage floods for safety of lives and properties of the people within various constraints including technical, geographical, financial and political constraints. It is a matter of concern that the floods annually result in loss of more than 1650 human lives besides annual damage of more than Rs. 3600 crore to crops, houses and public utilities on an average.

Our country has total geographic area of 329 million hectare (mha) out of which the Rashtriya Barh Ayog (RBA) had in 1980 had assessed the area liable to floods as 40 mha. Due to varying magnitude and distribution of floods, the State Governments have intimated an increase in flood affected area but the figures reported by different States need ground verification. In order to remove the anomalies in the figures of flood affected area and to make a more scientific assessment of the flood prone area in the country, the Ministry of Water Resources has constituted an Expert Committee headed by the Chairman, Central Water Commission (CWC) in July, 2012 which has started interaction with the States. The work of this Committee would be of

great help in prioritizing suitable flood management measures as per need of the concerned area.

With the flood management measures undertaken so far, an area of 18.78 mha has been reported as provided reasonably protected against floods. As more than 50% of flood prone area still requires protection against floods, today, the challenge before us is to find out possible solutions backed by latest technologies to provide a reasonable degree of protection in the remaining flood prone area.

When it comes to identify the causes responsible for floods, we first of all try to blame the nature. Although, it cannot be denied that there are many factors like high intensity rainfall in a short duration, non-availability of natural drainage and other geographical constraints which are really beyond the control of men but the human activities like poor and neglected maintenance of flood control structures including the embankments, faulty operation of reservoirs, encroachments in the river water way and ignoring proper drainage requirements while planning new colonies are also responsible for floods.

The experts always advocate construction of large storage reservoirs as a permanent solution to floods and I also fully endorse this view, but there are many constraints including geographical and political ones which impede the process of planning and construction of such large storage reservoirs. Therefore, we must be in readiness with the alternative plans like development of natural detention basins, raising and strengthening of existing

embankments, improvement of channel capacities to carry the required flow and, of course, the non-structural measures of which the flood forecasting and flood plain zoning are the most important.

The activity of flood forecasting is being performed by CWC with full dedication and this has enabled the States in taking appropriate decisions about evacuation of people from flood affected areas to safer places. During XII Plan, the Ministry of Water Resources has also proposed inundation forecasting which would provide information about specific areas likely to be submerged due to floods. For this purpose, the work for survey of river basins including bathymetric survey and preparation of Digital Elevation Maps initially for 2 lakh sq km of flood affected area in the States of UP, Bihar and West Bengal is proposed to be got done from Survey of India during XII Plan. We would know more details of this activity during the presentation arranged by the officers of Ministry of Water Resources.

In order to have clear demarcation of zones bearing flood risk potential as per different value of flood frequencies, the Union Government has been requesting all the States since 1975 for enacting suitable legislation on flood plain zoning but the progress in this regard is not encouraging. Some States have even informed that such a zoning is not possible there. In view of importance of flood plain zoning, the Ministry of Water Resources has taken up the issue again with all States so that any modifications that need to be done in the Model Bill could be considered. I would also urge the

Hon'ble Members to express their opinion on the issue during this meeting or even subsequently.

The State Governments are taking various measures of flood management with their own resources and the Union Government is also supplementing their efforts by rendering technical advice besides a promotional nature financial assistance. However, it is a matter of concern that out of Rs.8000 crore allocated by the Union Government under Flood Management Programme (FMP) during XI Plan for flood management, anti-erosion and drainage development projects, we could utilize only Rs.3566 crore. The FMP has been proposed to be continued during XII Plan with an outlay of Rs. 10000 crore and the States must make a better preparation for fully utilizing the allocations during XII Plan. In order to streamline the procedure for approval of flood management schemes, the Ministry of Water Resources has proposed changes in the existing approval mechanism for FMP during XII Plan.

The Union Government is also making continuous dialogue with Nepal on the Pancheshwar Multipurpose project on river Mahakali(Sharda), Saptakosi High Dam on river Saptakosi and Naumure Hydro-electric Project on West Rapti in Nepal. These projects would have benefits of irrigation, hydro-power generation and flood control in India. We have also been receiving flood data from Bhutan and China which is used in flood forecasting in Indian side.

From time to time, the State Government of Assam has been raising concerns over the flood damages in the States caused floods and their seeking advice in addressing these concerns for a permanent solutions. We would be having a brain storming session after the meeting particularly devoted to the flood problems in North East. Tomorrow, we would also be visiting Majuli Island to see the extent of flood management measures undertaken by Brahmaputra Board.

I would urge the Hon'ble Members for their valuable suggestions for effective flood management in the country.
