



Speech of
KALAINAR M. KARUNANIDHI

Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu

**FIFTY THIRD
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
COUNCIL**

29th May 2007

New Delhi

Honourable Prime Minister and Members of the National Development Council,

I extend my warm greetings to you all. Today we are meeting to discuss the strategy for agriculture and allied sectors in the Eleventh Five Year Plan. I am very happy that this august body is devoting its attention to the subject of Food and Agriculture, based on the Report of the NDC Sub-Committee. High economic growth will have no meaning for the masses of people living in rural areas unless agriculture is revitalized.

2. Water is an acutely scarce resource. Its timely availability is critical even for maintaining current levels of agricultural output. In recent months we have witnessed numerous instances where sharing of river waters have become a source of discord between States. The National Common Minimum Programme commits the UPA Government to “take all steps to ensure that inter-state water disputes are settled amicably at the earliest, keeping in mind the interests of all parties to the dispute”. Our existing institutional arrangements for managing inter-state rivers seem to have broken down. Unless we create effective institutional arrangements, sharing of river waters is likely to become a source of internal conflict. If it is not attended to properly and in time, it could threaten

the integrity of the Nation in the decades to come. Entry 56 of the Union List in the Constitution provides for nationalization of inter-state rivers within the competence of the Union. Nationalisation offers the only long term solution to this serious problem. I urge the Prime Minister to initiate action on this.

3. Tamil Nadu has been depending on neighbouring States Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, for its requirements of water for drinking and agriculture. With all my respects to our friends from those States, who are present here, I should say that mutual agreements, Tribunal, Judicial pronouncements have not served their purpose in regard to water. We have been talking of haves and have-nots for long; but these surplus States have been reluctant to spare the natural resource to their sister-state, which is very much water-starved. This does not speak well of our Federal structure. Though a surgery is called for to solve the present crisis; even a healing dose has not been made available so far to Tamil Nadu. Therefore I plead with the Union Government to come forward to lend support to Tamil Nadu, which is in dire need of water; without causing any strain in its age-old relationship with its neighbouring States.

4. In the area of agriculture, even though many research studies have been conducted and many experts and technical institutions have produced lengthy reports, there has been no major breakthrough in rainfed agriculture. Improved water availability holds the key to increasing agricultural output and farmers' incomes. Better cropping practices alone are not enough. At the last NDC meeting, I had stressed the urgent need for inter-linking the peninsular rivers. The Planning Commission's Approach Paper calls for "expansion of irrigation where it is possible at an economic cost". The National Common Minimum Programme has made a commitment to assess the feasibility of inter-linking rivers, starting with south-bound rivers. The National Water Development Agency under the Ministry of Water Resources has already completed feasibility studies on the Peninsular component. It has concluded that it is technically possible and economically viable to transfer water from the surplus river basins to the deficit ones. If we are serious in pursuing agricultural prosperity, we must act now itself without further loss of time. The project for inter-linking peninsular rivers should be included and funded as part of the agriculture strategy of the 11th Plan.

5. I would like to impress upon you the adverse conditions in the State in regard to water scarcity. Tamil Nadu does not have even a single perennial river originating in this State. It is totally dependent on release of water by other States. I have already referred to the institutional problem in sharing such waters. Apart from shortage of surface water resources, Tamil Nadu also suffers from ground water deficiency. Out of the 385 blocks in the State, 175 are classified as over-exploited and critical. Rainfall is also deficient in Tamil Nadu. A stage has been reached where conventional agriculture has become impossible in many parts of Tamil Nadu. The NDC Sub-Committee has classified the Country into 15 agro-climatic regions. Considering its special problems, Tamil Nadu should be declared a separate agro-climatic region, in addition to the other fifteen. The Centre must recognize the special circumstances of Tamil Nadu and the gravity of the situation in the field. The existing Central schemes are insufficient to meet the needs and are linked to various conditions. Therefore, Tamil Nadu deserves a special treatment by the Centre. **I urge the Centre to extend Special Central Assistance for a scheme to promote agro-forestry, horticulture and water-efficient crops in Tamil Nadu.**

6. Apart from agriculture, we must not forget the importance of animal husbandry and fisheries, especially in a State like Tamil Nadu with a long coast line. I hope the Plan will give due emphasis to them. In this respect, I have to refer to the difficulties being faced by the fishermen of Tamil Nadu due to the disturbed situation in Sri Lanka. I call upon the Union Government to ensure the safety of fishermen so that development of fisheries in Tamil Nadu is not affected.

7. When talking of agricultural development, we have to ensure that the focus is on the welfare of the farmers. Farmers in many parts of the country have suffered acutely from debt burden and this has been a source of serious concern. It had even led to suicides in some States. The Government of Tamil Nadu took a bold step to waive agricultural loans worth Rs.7,000 crores immediately after assuming office. This step has brought immediate relief to the farming community and has enabled them to once again access rural credit. I am happy to note that the Sub-Committee of the NDC has recommended that where natural calamity occurs consecutively for three years, the loans given to the small, marginal, tenant farmers should be waived and I reiterate our request to share

the cost of the waiver of co-operative loans announced by the Government of Tamil Nadu.

8. Ours is a large country. The specific actions to be taken in different areas will be different. The Centrally Sponsored Schemes are subject to too many conditions and restrictions and do not recognise the local variations. The cost of administration is high because there are so many schemes. There is a need for simplifying the schemes. A lumpsum Central Assistance could be given based on an agreed strategy appropriate for each State instead of the fragmented sums now given. This will make the Central Assistance more productive. I urge the Planning Commission to introduce this change from the coming financial year.

9. India cannot prosper if farmers do not prosper. I look forward to fruitful deliberations so that we can create a new India in which farmers join in rapid growth.

Thank you.
