

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

SPEECH

BY

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I feel highly privileged today to be present here in this 27th conference of the SIMCON and to address this august gathering. This is an apt platform to consider new proposals as well as review the various activities taken up by the State Governments and decide on further course of action to be taken up in this regard.

A) FLS scheme:

At the very outset, I would like to draw your attention to the various schemes taken up by the Assam Government to create public awareness about the developmental activities undertaken by the Government. The Government of Assam has evolved a unique scheme of reaching out to the masses through a network of Fixed Loudspeaker Systems (FLS). More **than 500 Gaon Panchayats have already been covered by these** installations and gradually all the Gaon Panchayats will be covered in a phased manner. This has helped, not only to accelerate the pace of information dissemination but also in bringing them closer to the District Administration apart from keeping the rural people aware of all the developmental activities taken up by the State. The rural people are now showing their trust in the government mechanism and this in return has helped in uniting the people further. The AIR news bulletin, agricultural programme and important Govt. developmental activities are broadcast through this FLS programme. As a result, the rural population are now aware of different developmental activities of the State and Central

Governments which help in proper implementation of the schemes and projects.

B) Entertainment Tax Rates:

Under the able leadership of our Chief Minister, Shri Tarun Gogoi, the Entertainment Industry in Assam is getting an adequate support from the State Government. The State Government has reduced the entertainment tax on cinema to the maximum extent possible to boost the commercial growth of this industry. Further, the permanent multiplex and permanent mini cinema hall as defined in the Assam Cinema (Regulations) Rules, 1960, which have started their commercial operation on or after 1st April, 2007 have been exempted from payment of entertainment tax for a period of 5 years. Amusement parks are also exempted from payment of entertainment tax for a period of five years from the date of commencement of their commercial operation. Another positive step taken is granting permission for computerised ticketing system against payment of security in lieu of affixing stamps on admission tickets.

Apart from giving incentives to regional filmmakers, the Government is also encouraging the local producers, directors, actors and technical workers by organising Assam Film Festival and Award functions every two years to honour the best performers in the industry. The "Kid-Fest" organised by State Government in association with the Children Film Society of India has become a popular film festival event. Having recently organised a Film Festival of Documentaries made by the Films Division, the State Govt is desirous of making it an annual event. The Government, on its part is also making short documentaries on important issues relating to counter insurgency measures, patriotism, developmental activities and other social issues. The State Government has also suggested that Films for short duration may be made by Films Division in the local language on themes like ill effects of insurgency/terrorisms, evil effect of drugs, natural resources of the State, tourism potential etc.

With the introduction of E- governance, there is easy accessibility to information now. This adds to transparency and also serves as a medium of skill information. With this system of communication, each and every corner of the State can be effectively covered and thus communication becomes a reality even in remote rural areas. The State Government proposes to introduce IT in a big way to make information related to Govt. activities easily accessible to the citizens.

C) Study Tours for Journalists:

From time to time, the Assam Government has been conducting study tours for local journalists to various places of interest so as to give them an insight into developmental activities undertaken by the Government. Here I would like to inform you that, our Government is creating a Journalist Welfare Fund with a corpus of Rs. One crore this year, in order to help journalists who need medical aid. This is a very positive step which will benefit several needy journalists of the State.

D) Strengthening of Government Media:

The North East is one of the remote regions of the country and is also bounded by international boundaries. Hence, the need of the hour is to make sure that the people in these areas have access to the national networks of DDK, AIR and also broadband services so that no external propaganda can affect these people. The Chief Minister, Assam had voiced his concern from time to time over the sensationalization of news and advocated the need of a mechanism to regulate this. We would once again request the Centre to create a mechanism to check sensationalization of news both in print and electronic media in the interest of maintenance of law & order, communal harmony etc.

In this context, we welcome the proposed Broadcasting Services Regulation Bill for regulation of Broadcasting services for objective reporting of news and dissemination of information and also for

regulation of content for public viewing . The role of media both electronic and print during the serial bomb blasts in Assam on 30th October, 2008 and in the 26/11 terrorist attack in Mumbai in 2008 has not been encouraging. On many occasions, the ghastly and objectionable pictures of persons killed or injured in terrorist attack are also telecast or printed. We need to show due respect to the dead bodies of persons killed in such incidents. I do not remember seeing pictures of dead bodies of persons killed in 9/11 attack on World Trade Centre in New York being telecast in 2002. We believe in free media but in such emotional matters, the media need to restrain itself and also respect individual privacy. The Broadcasting Services Regulation Bill can play a positive role in these matters.

Another important issue is the need for positive publicity in both print and the electronic media about the condition of the North East. Due to the geographical alienation of this region and lack of awareness, it has been observed that a large section of population in the rest of the country do not have a correct impression about this area. Although DDK gives a balanced coverage, a definite policy needs to be implemented so that the right type of information is disseminated in the entire country.

The flora and fauna of Assam is a major tourist attraction but the State is also facing the menace of poaching. In addition to providing tourism related information, the media can also be effectively used to check activities of poachers, to eradicate the evil designs of poachers by exposing their evil designs.

The Information and Public Relations department is a treasure house of information which has to be meticulously stored and retrieved as and when required. In order to properly file and store these information whether in the form of newspaper reports or articles, a micro film based archival system with easy retrieval device is required to be introduced.

E) Measures to curb piracy:

The Govt. of Assam has taken a serious note of piracy activities plaguing the mass communication industry especially the film and video cassette dominated audio visual sector. The CID, under Assam Police, in the meantime, in close co-ordination with the District Police, NGOs and other agencies has taken preventive measures to curb the menace of piracy and detect copyright crime. As a result of effective vigilance, the State law enforcing machinery was able to arrest 149 numbers of offenders besides registering of 163 cases under Copy Right Act during last 5 years.

F) Film City:

The Govt. of Assam proposes to construct a Film City in the campus of the Jyoti Chitraban Film Studio at Guwahati. This film city will provide outdoor shooting infrastructure within the same campus, which in turn will offer scope of production economy to the producers by reducing costs. The revenue thus generated would also help the Film Studio to be self sufficient and enable it to provide all facilities under one roof.

G) Digitalisation of the cable sector- way forward:

Digital TV allows more channels to be transmitted over Optical and Coaxial networks and is a new standard for better picture quality. The State Government through AMTRON, a public sector undertaking under Government of Assam has taken initiative to expand its network and build up infrastructure for this sector by utilising viable technology. ADSS-optical fibre project has been taken up by AMTRON in three districts of Assam namely Nagaon, Jorhat and Kamrup for transmission of Tele-vision channels to remote areas. For this purpose GPON (Gigabit Passive Optic Network) technology being explored in these districts for transmission of voice, data and

video (triple plan) in the same network. The system will be capable to deliver Digital TV to remote areas alongwith Broadband Internet and Rural Telephony. In this context, it is mentioned that the State Government has successfully used optical fibre during last 33rd National Games held in Guwahati to connect games venue with games village for broadcast of cable channels.

H) Proposed Amendments to the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867:

We welcome the amendments proposed to be made in this Act. Amendment of Section 1 of the PRB Act, to define district Magistrate and Magistrate to clear the ambiguity is a positive step. As far as the provision of applying for title on prescribed form to RNI is concerned, the standing committee on Information Technology, in its 19th report, has made certain new provisions and a provision as section 5(2) in the Act is being suggested to see that the newspaper is not infringing upon the copyright of any of the existing publications in India. With regard to refusal of Titles, the proposal to insert new provisions as section 5(3) and 5(B) for refusal of titles is also welcome. The proposal that the Titles already verified till one year before the notified date but not registered as newspapers till the notified date, shall be deemed as deblocked is again a positive step. In addition, the amendment being proposed for de-registration of newspapers, which fail to submit Annual Statement for two consecutive years and insertion of new provision as Section-8(ii) in the Act will help in streamlining this field.

I thank you all for giving me a patient hearing and I hope that the deliberations here will go a long way in solving most of the problems faced by this sector at present.

Jai Hind
