

# SPEECH OF SHRI LAL THANHAWLA, HON'BLE CHIEF MINISTER, MIZORAM ON THE OCCASION OF CONCLAVE ON URBAN POVERTY ALLEVIATION AT AIZAWL ON 16 SEPTEMBER. 2011

I heartily welcome you all to the State of Mizoram. I am genuinely grateful to the Hon'ble Union Minister of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, **Kumari Selja**-ji, for her decision to hold this **Regional Conclave** here in Mizoram. This has strengthened our perception of her concern and affinity towards this remote and difficult region of the Country.

I am also grateful to the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Manipur, Shri Ibobi Singh-ji, Hon'ble Ministers from our Sister States, Officials of the Ministry and the State Governments and other delegates for their kind presence.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that today's event is a historic occasion for Mizoram in particular, and for the North Eastern States in general, as it is the first time such a Ministerial Conference under the Ministry is hosted here. I have no doubt that this Conclave will have the desired impact, and help us gain valuable insights into the programmes and policies of the Central Government for meeting the challenges of urbanization and urban poverty. Similarly, the Ministry may also gain deeper understanding of the issues specific to the North Eastern Region and would be in a much better position to re-orient and fine-tune its policy for better and more successful implementation of the various schemes.

We are all aware of the challenges thrown up by rapid urbanization. The corresponding growth in urban poverty, if not addressed early with proper handling, can pose a serious concern. I thank the UPA Government for undertaking a massive programme under Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) to provide shelter and basic amenities to the urban poor, and for framing a bold, new policy approach in the form of Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) to make Indian cities slum - free. I am also thankful for the slew of measures taken by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation to uplift the urban poor. These are sound policies and programmes and are suitably supplemented by a visionary and committed Minister at the helm, and her team of highly capable and dedicated officers in the Ministry. We can, therefore, confidently look towards the future, and be assured in the knowledge that whatever possible will be done to meet the urban challenges.

As with the rest of the country, Mizoram is also witnessing an unprecedented growth following India's phenomenal economic growth. And as far as urbanization is concerned, our State is among the few where the rural-urban gap is closing fast.

According to 2001 Census, the total population of Mizoram was 8.88 lakh where the **rural** population was **4.47 lakh** against an **urban** population of **4.41 lakh**, that is roughly **50%**. In the 2011 Census (provisional) figures, the population has reached 1.09 million (or 10.91 lakh). Again here, the rural-urban population has remained more or less, the same.

The CHALLENGE therefore, is quite enormous given the limited resources and facilities in our urban centres.

**Infrastructure** bottleneck is the main concern in addressing the livelihood issues of the urban poor.

Our goal is to adequately **feed, educate, house** and **employ** the rapidly growing number of impoverished city dwellers which calls for imaginative approaches.

Here I would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the Hon'ble Union Minister Kumari Selja and her Ministry for the support bestowed on us.

One pertinent issue that I would like to highlight is the very issue of slums on which RAY is based upon. As much as slums emerge out of urban poverty, yet their evolution and forms are highly dependent upon the pattern of urban settlements, social patterns, land holding systems and the economics prevailing in a particular place, coupled with unchecked migration to urban areas. These are comprehensive challenges. Hence, the definition and scope of **'Slum'** in the context of RAY needs to be carefully looked into. It is also necessary to determine whether we should concentrate ourselves on slums alone or on the plights of the urban poor wherever they are. If we are to go strictly by the definition, slums are more or less non-existent in Hilly States in general and in our State in particular. This is the distinction we have with other parts of the country, and is possibly due to our social homogeneity and a classless society where the poor mixed with the rich in our existing settlements. Another factor could also be the type of terrain in our areas where houses are built on slopes, wherein the owners generally settle in Ground Floor (G) and G-plus floors leaving the basements for rentals at relatively low costs. These basements are generally poorly developed with hardly enough infrastructure or social facilities like drinking water, etc. Especially with the majority of buildings on non-pucca structures, the living conditions and amenities in the basements are in very dilapidated conditions, apart from the smallness of the carpet area of the living areas. In cities and towns with tens of thousands of houses, such basements could cater to the housing requirements of thousands of the poor families, who would otherwise stay in slums, had they happened to stay in urban areas of other parts of the country.

We need low-cost housing, provision of basic social and infrastructure facilities for decent standard of living and make them contribute to the economy. We would like to take advantage of the upcoming RAY, **possibly in a modified version in the hilly States of North Eastern Region**. This will definitely entail a slight variation in the scope and definition of slums and slum-type settlements. Reducing the compact settlements of 20 households to 10 for North Eastern Region to qualify as slum will be inadequate to address our requirement. We need to extend the scope of RAY to cater to our specific needs and pattern, and special provisions may be incorporated in the guidelines towards this end. Such re-orientation will enable us identify urban settlers who are in the same precarious condition as those of slum dwellers in other parts of the country, and take up their cause within the ambit of RAY. It will also be instrumental in achieving the second objective of prevention of emergence of new slums under the programme.

I sincerely appreciate the efforts of the Government of India to alleviate urban poverty through programmes such as:-

- (i) Nehru Rozgar Yojana;
- (ii) Urban Basic Services for the Poor; and
- (iii) Environmental Improvement of Urban Slums.

**Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY)** is a very bold step, but its success will be seen only when the State Governments and Urban Local Bodies come forward and share this bold vision. I take this opportunity to assure the Government of India of our serious commitment to work for the success of RAY. I also appeal to our Sister States in the region to make the same commitment so that this bold and new vision is implemented successfully to address urban poverty in the most effective manner, and make urban India the forefront of the economy.

I would once again like to express my gratitude to **Kumari Selja-y** for arranging this Regional Conclave to address the specific issues of the North Eastern Region, and for giving us the opportunity to host this august gathering. I hope that this conference will result in meaningful discussions on the specific issues of the North Eastern Region, leading to a better and more successful implementation of the programmes by suitably fine-tuning it to meet the unique requirement of this Region.

Thank you