

## **Welcome address by Pu Lal Thanhawla, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Mizoram**

**DATED: 8th March 2010**

Respected Madam Soniaji,

On this occasion of the beginning of celebration in Mizoram of the 125th year of Indian National Congress, which is the largest democratic party in the world, I, on behalf of the Government and the people of Mizoram, as also on my own behalf, extend to you a very warm and hearty welcome. We feel delighted and no less honoured to have you in our midst once again.

The foundation stone which you have just laid has been named Rajiv Gandhi Sports Stadium in fond memory of our beloved leader, the late Shri Rajiv Gandhi. Madam, you may kindly recall that when you visited Mizoram in July, 1986 the youth of Mizoram received you at various places with placards which read 'Give us world class sports stadium, we shall give you world class players'. Rajivji responded positively. This project is going to be the culmination of the wishes of the youth of Mizoram and that of the positive response of Rajivji.

As a member of an illustrious family of the country, you carry with you a legacy and tradition of that family, the tradition of abiding interest in the well - being and progress of the tribals, the backward and the disadvantaged sections of the society. And the people of Mizoram, therefore, hold you in high-esteem, respect and special love.

Madam, we acknowledge with deep appreciation the contribution you had made in the unprecedented victory of the party in the last Assembly elections, the elections to the Village Councils where we won 80% of the Councils; followed by the Lok Sabha election which we won handsomely. Your presence itself was a great inspiration. I assure you that we will try to live up to your expectation and that we shall not be found wanting in sense of purpose; in redeeming our pledges made to the party and to the people of Mizoram. We are also determined to live up to the expectation of the people of Mizoram and ensure corruption free and transparent Government.

You have been generous and magnanimous to us in Mizoram, extending your helping hand wherever sought for. You have always heard our pleas and requests for financial and institutional support from the centre in matters concerning all-round progress and development of our poor state. We extend our deep gratitude and at the same time, hope that this unflinching support would continue to be there in the coming days.

I would particularly refer to your unstinted support in getting our flagship programme, the New Land Use Programme appreciated and approved by the Centre. The NLUP aims at effecting co-ordinated, balanced and inclusive development and economic empowerment of the rural poor. At the same time, this programme aims at afforestation and environmental improvement. May I humbly submit that NLUP is a modest but bold and positive step towards achieving a goal so dear to respected and beloved Rajivji who dedicated his services toward wiping out tears from the eyes of the poor and to give them political and economic powers as an equal stake holders in the process of growth. With your blessings and that of our able Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, this small step, I am confident, will be a big stride forward.

Madam, we do not want to don the robe of a beggar with our begging bowl for all time to come. We want to be self-reliant as quickly as possible. But there are countless hurdles on our way forward. We need hand-holding from you. Our appeal to the Centre has been : "Help us now to ultimately help you." This appeal may be heard with sympathy and understanding. In this we can and shall bank on your good self.

History, I am sure, will record with appreciation, the imaginative and humane faced leadership of the party, particularly of Rajivji, in bringing back peace to this part of our great country, shattered by two

decades of violence. Because of Rajivji's wise guidance and the sacrifice of Congress workers, Mizoram is now an island of peace. We shall preserve it. We are determined to do that. We know we can. More so because we shall have your blessings. May I recall and reminiscence with reverence and appreciation that immediately after the Peace Accord was signed, your entire family with Rajivji and the children traversed the length and breath of Mizoram by road under rain, sunshine and bad roads; stopping at every village and entering into dilapidated houses, interacting with the poor villagers who admired and adored you all the way. Rajivji's amiable and sociable disposition, ably supplemented by yourself, has endeared all of you to the Mizo people.

May I take this opportunity to express our wholehearted support to your policy of Women Empowerment which I feel should be appreciated by lawmakers and by one and all for the interest of the country. We also appreciate and support your reservation policy for women.

Once again, I thank you Madam, for having spared this time to visit Mizoram inspite of your extremely busy schedule. That only confirms your love and concern for this state and its lovely people. May the Lord grant you good health and long life to serve the teeming millions for many more years to come.

Thank you, Jai Hind.

Lal Thanhawla