

**Address by Shri Lal Thanhawla, Chief Minister of Mizoram, as Chief Guest at the India Business Forum on 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2009 at Singapore.**

I deem it is a great honour and unique privilege to be able to take part in the India Business Forum attended by a large number of dignitaries, administrators, industrialists, technologists and financiers. May I, to begin with, convey my heartfelt thanks to the organizers of the event for having given me this opportunity to participate in the high level deliberations with great socio economic importance.

There is a significant statement in the Bible which says, and I quote: "Where there is no vision, the people perish". A nation or a region must have a vision – a vision of future, of progress and prosperity. Such a vision requires participatory development by harnessing the natural resources of a region. And one of the most important resources happens to be water. It must, however, be emphasized that water needs to be managed as an economic asset rather than a free commodity. Its management and regeneration must be the responsibility of every user agency. Proper sanitation and clean drinking water are considered as two of the necessities and pre-conditions for development. Although the States of the Union, including those in the North Eastern Region, have been making continuous efforts to increase the reach of these two important services, there are still large gap to be bridged and large number of house holds to be provided with these two basic services both in the rural and urban areas of the North East. The continuance of the service, coverage and efficiency of the sewerage system, inadequacy of safe drinking water and absence of the system for solid waste disposal have also told on the general health conditions of the people. It is true that during the last 2 decades quality water supply level has increased considerably. But the percentage of house-holds having access to these facility in the States of the region is still below the national average. In fact, in 3 of the hill States in the region, only 30% of the house-holds reported to have access to safe drinking water. The problem is more acute in the urban

areas compared to the rural areas as is evident from the fact that deprivation index in rural areas of almost all the States are better than that in the urban areas. The two critical issues in regard to water supply are (a) appropriate technology to prevent slippage and (b) proper maintenance. Both these issues are important. Total availability of surface as well as ground water sources in India is estimated at 1122 BCM, which is about 4% of the world's fresh water resources. The North Eastern Region is very rich in water resources. The surface water resources available in the region are estimated at over 652 BCM which accounts for about 34% of the country's total surface water resources. India's estimated Hydro-power potential is estimated of about 85,000 MW. The North Eastern Region alone accounts for nearly 38% of the country's total potential. So far only a little over 3% of this potential has been exploited. There are 185 identified sites for undertaking water resources development project primarily for Hydro-power generation in the region. A time bound programme to implement these projects with required technological and financial support must be taken up in the larger interest of socio-economic development of the country.

North East is under a Homogenous rainfall region with a mean annual rainfall of 2070mm of which monsoon rainfall accounts for 69%. The annual rainfall varies between 1100mm and 1300mm. Rain-water harvesting, particularly in the hill areas of the region, which has not so far attracted due attention, must therefore, be promoted along with rejuvenation of other traditional water harvesting systems in the region. Otherwise the paradoxical problem of society in the midst of plenty will continue to be a constraint on overall development of the land and its people. The present scale and technique of industrialization of the vast water resources of the region has not been quite satisfactory. I strongly feel that policies and practices relating to utilization of these resources need for a future orientated outlook. There had to be a paradigm policy towards integrated water resource management. Piece meal and short-term measures that now exist should give way to an integrated basic management approach based on the principles of soil and water conservation as supplementary sustainable development. Time has come to adopt a system of water resource utilization involving the local population and strengthening the existing institution. It has to be

based on more accurate assessment of the potential and of the natural and human heritage. Such a integrated water resource management approach would lead to sustainable development. It will possibly be a good initiative to make education and training on the integrated water resource management as a part of the teaching curriculum in the educational institutions of different levels.

The North East faces two problems – one is peculiar to the plains and the other peculiar to the hill areas. Availability of large water bodies in the plains can promote agriculture and allied sector. Non-availability of it in the hill areas retards growth in the sector. The two river systems in the plain creates flood and resultant devastation over 3.38 million ha on an average every year. On the other hand, in the hill areas water run-off being very rapid, there is shortage of water not only for agriculture operation but also for human consumption. The need of the hour is a water policy that provides for a judicious combination of structural and non-structural measures for flood moderation and effective technological measures to harvest and conserve rain water. It will lead to integrated management of water resources for sustainable development.

The North Eastern Region has the biggest natural resource potential to offer to the world. This offer is based on futuristic projections that are backed up by both geographical and historical facts. It has been said that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be known as the century for Fresh Water. Very few dispute this claim or doubt that fresh water will be the most sought after commodity of this century. North Eastern Region of India will surely command the commercial interest and attention of the whole world. The entire N.E. Region enjoys the highest precipitation in the world-12,000mm annually in Meghalaya alone. Billions of cusecs of the water fall on the region each year. Sooner or later there will be people and nations who will be ready to pay for the fresh water that they need and we should be ready to gratify this need. What needs to be done is to put in places technologies to conserve, amass and harvest this gift from heaven.

One of the 8 goals which the member nations of UNO decided to achieve by 2015 included a commitment to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water. This will call for innovative measures, updated technology, including technology for treating and purifying waste water for reuse, water filtering, rain water harvesting etc., as a well coordinated programme involving the people right from the grass-root level. We have to evolve a strategy and work out a plan to face an emerging situation of water shortage due to over exploitation of this important natural resource. The World Bank's country report on water management (October, 2005) contained a word of caution: India will face a severe water crises in 20 years if existing methods of use are not changed and proper water management system is not put in place. It is for administrators, technologist and user agencies to wake up to this threat and programmes that can help tackle the anticipated crisis. I confess that the path is not rosy all the way. There are constraints of terrain, of logistical disadvantage and infrastructural deficiency. But human ingenuity, a sense of purpose and commitment to a cause surely convert such difficulties into opportunities and I believe the forum can throw up a way out.

I would like to thank the organizers once again for giving me this opportunity to share some thoughts, based on my limited exposure to this subject, with a galaxy of experts and wish the forum all success.

Thank you very much.