

**Subject: Solutions Required by Siliguri and Other Indian Cities.**

**Asok Bhattacharya  
Mayor, Siliguri  
Siliguri, West Bengal**

*(Text of the speech delivered in New Delhi on the 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2017 in a session on Swiss Innovations for Smart Cities in India, the theme of the discussion was “Solution required by Siliguri and other Indian cities”, on the invitation of Dr. Andreas Baum, the Ambassador of Switzerland to India)*

**Introducing Siliguri:**

Located in the foothills of the Darjeeling Himalayas, Siliguri has been the second most urbanized emerging metropolitan city in West Bengal. The city is witnessing a rapid expansion of its population particularly in the last few decades. Siliguri is designated to be the gate way to the North-Eastern states of India. Siliguri is a poly-lingual and multi-cultural city. Surrounded by hundreds of tea gardens, and forests in the vicinity Siliguri. The geopolitical and strategic importance of Siliguri can be well understood for its neighboring international borders with Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and China is not very far from this City. Growth rate of motorized vehicles in Siliguri is more than population growth. The emission rate of carbon particles out of fossil fuel and such other conventional energy has become the most serious concern for the city. Its environmental quality causing Meteorologically, Siliguri is situated in the hot spot zone that is within the range of seismic zone-4. I am thankful to Swiss Co-operation office to make Siliguri as a partner of capacity building for Low Carbon and Climate Resilient City Development in India, project.

### **Urban Developmental Issues in Siliguri:**

The urbanization of Siliguri is not matched by any corresponding industrialization. Siliguri is famous for five T's, Tea, Trading, Transport, Tourism and Table Tennis. Cities like Siliguri do not engineer growth for the general urban inhabitants, they copy the model of the Indian megapolis.

The growing pressure of population on the city of Siliguri and its adjoining areas gives rise to the problems of housing, infrastructures like roads, drainages, sewerages, purified drinking water, solid waste management, and enormously growing vehicles on the road, traffic control, recycling of garbage and inadequacies of other basic civic amenities. In fact, Siliguri as a city is suffering with the inadequacies of basic civic amenities and basic infrastructure to be provided to the millions of population. Impacts of Global Warming and climate change are also being felt in and around of Siliguri.

### **Urbanization as Inevitability:**

The century we live in is the era of urbanization. Urbanization of this century is in fact the experiences of urbanization in Asian and Latin American countries particularly India and China. It is a fact that during eighteenth century, Urbanization was an offshoot of industrialization was initiated in the developed countries of Europe along with concomitant positive productive forces. In this sense, the terms urbanization and civilization are synonymous. One of the indexes of civilization is urbanization which generates economic momentum and development. It provides developed quality services, infrastructures, development of science

and technology, innovative technology transformations, creation of employment opportunities, availability of the basic civic amenities. Thus, urbanization is inescapable. We are passing an era of 3<sup>rd</sup> generation of urbanization which is called urbanization during the prudent era as the transformative force. Aspiration and expectation of cities during this era are growing endlessly.

### **India's Urbanization:**

India's urban experience is largely different from the West. The same with the other decolonized countries which became independent immediately after the Second World War. Taking India together, these countries' economies are largely dependent on agriculture and over populated. During 1950's, India had 19% of urban population. After six decades, the percentage of urban population has increased to 32%. Though Indian percentage of urban population is lower in comparison with other developed countries. However, in terms of number of urban population, India ranks second after China. On the contrary, agriculture still remains as the primary sector of the economy which absorbs 58% of the employment in India. As a result, in rural area, non-agricultural activities have been on the rise. A large chunk of peasants is attracted to the urban areas to work as non-skilled workers and engaged them in the informal sector of the urban economy for their livelihood. In the West, labor force migrated to the European towns and cities to get them engaged in production based industries. Thus such rural-urban migration was much more productive and positive than the developing countries. It is also unfortunate to note that in India, the share of production based industrial sector to the GDP is not also enhancing. What is enhancing is the share of Tertiary sector of the economy.

Within a short passage time, the total number of urban population in India would be 66 crores. While in 2001, India had 5161 towns including cities, in 2011, the number has been increased to 7935. Moreover, urban culture has largely been extended to the rural villages due to expansion of link roads and other infrastructural facilities. Rural areas have been changing very rapidly. Villages have been largely impacted by urban culture. Records suggest that 65% of the total revenue income is accrued from the cities and towns in India. Within 10 to 15 years, the majority share of employment shall be generated in the towns and the cities. Another unique feature is that in India, unlike West, the number of metropolitan cities is very less. In 1901, there was only one metropolitan city and by now, according to Census Report, 2011, India is having 53 such cities. India's urban space is composed of innumerable small and medium towns and non-municipal areas and 2<sup>nd</sup> tier of cities. Another important point is that the highest number of youth population lives in Indian towns and cities. Number of urban middle class is highest in India in the world. These are the consuming class. A neo middle class is emerging in urban India which has the aspiration of better living standard.

The basic urban amenities are not even in a moderate position in India. Problem of affordable housing is increasing in many big and small cities. It seems there are two cities within one city. To address the issues, the Government of India has launched certain important programs for the urban areas which include JNNURM; AMRUT; Housing For All; Smart City and such other programs. It is to be noted that Smart City Program has an elitist connotation without having any trickle down effects. In China such programs sometimes gave rise to 'ghost cities' or pre-maturely built cities.

In the recently held Conference of HABITET-III, the basic call was- ‘cities for all’ and ‘Rights to the City’ to attain sustainable and inclusive harmonious development. The basic face of India’s urban development should be directed to the calls of HABITET-III. In fact, the Conference has reiterated Mahatma Gandhi’s path of development while he professed, ‘Earth has enough to meet the need of the people, but not the greed’. India needs sustainable urban development, a development which can meet the need of the present without compromising the ability to meet the need of the future. To face the challenges of urbanization democratic decentralization and peoples participation has an important role. In India 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act is a historical step towards this.

To conclude, not only in India but throughout the world, we have been experiencing with the process of third generation of urbanization, which is highly critical and complex, however, inevitable and inescapable. There are challenges but also potential. I may mention here the concept of scientific outlook of development, which are harmonies with man, nature and society. You will be pleased to know very recently my book in Bengali ‘Urbanization of 3 Generation’ was published. I like to present a copy of this book to the Hon’ble Ambassador of Switzerland in India, along with my another book which was published last year on ‘Impact of Climate Changes on the Cities’.

Thank you once again to all of you who have given me a patient hearing.

**Swiss Innovations for Smart Cities in India: Solutions Required by Siliguri and Other Indian Cities.**

**Asok Narayan Bhattacharya  
Mayor, Siliguri  
Siliguri, West Bengal**

I feel deeply honored being invited as a speaker by the Swiss Co-operation Office in India, Embassy of Switzerland, at the session on Swiss Innovations for Smart Cities in India. I, am thankful to the Hon'ble Ambassador, Embassy of Switzerland and to the Organizing Committee of this Session for providing me an opportunity to speak and to exchange my experiences of more than thirty five years of my association in the practical field of urban development and Municipal administration.

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