

Text of speech of Shri Asok Bhattacharya, Mayor, Siliguri, delivered in the 49th Annual General Meeting of All India Council of Mayors in Mumbai.

1. While I thank the Chairman of All India Council of Mayors to convene this annual general meeting, I personally feel as one of the Secretaries of All India Council of Mayors, that the meetings of Executive Committees and office bearers of All India Council of Mayors should be held more regularly.
2. There are many socio-economic changes taking place in and around of cities. New expectations and aspirations are emerging amongst the citizens, and also many challenges are being faced by the city governments and the Mayors. We are passing the era of urbanization of 21st century, it is complex in nature. India needs a new National Urban Policy.
3. As you know we are passing through the 25th year of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act., which is a historical landmark in our country. In this 74th Constitutional Amendment Act. the urban local bodies have been recognized as constitutional institution and 3rd tire of government. Municipality means an institution of self government under article 243Q. This spirit must be upheld.

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4. Under Article 243W of Indian Constitution it is clearly mentioned that the ideals behind the amendments are
 - a) To enable them to function as institutions of self government.
 - b) To enable them to carry out the responsibilities conferred upon them including those related to the matters listed in the 12th Schedule.
5. The Article 243 Y(b) talks about “the measures needed to improve the financial position of the Municipalities.
6. As per the provision of 74th Constitutional Amendment Act., it is clearly mentioned that State Election Commission, State Finance Commission, District or Metropolitan Planning Committees, Ward Committees are also constitutional bodies and it is mandatory for the State Governments to give due recognition to these.
7. Unfortunately, many states in our country are not paying proper honour to these constitutional amendments while many are reluctant to implement these mandates. They have lack of political will to implement these amendments. Many states are violating the provisions of 74th Constitutional Amendment Act.
8. The elected urban local bodies and the Mayors are the supreme in power to frame any developmental policies and to co-ordinate with other government bodies. But it is seen that in many states, some parallel and parastatal bodies are becoming pro active and they are undermining the importance of the role of Mayors and elected urban local bodies. In some cities District Magistrates are acting parallel of the Mayors. These practices should be restricted by the respective State

Governments and the Union Government has to intervene into this matter.

9. In the name of Smart City Project Union Government is imposing a special purpose vehicle (S.P.V.) to conduct the project, in lieu of elected city governance, which is totally unconstitutional. This project must be allowed to implement by the elected ULBs.
10. All India Mayor Council should seek an appointment to meet the Chairman and Committee Members of 15th Finance Commission for a rational policy formulation and recommendation by them, so that cooperative Federalism is strengthened. Many states are not recognizing the ULBs as 3rd tier of government. The M.P.C and D.P.Cs, Ward Committee and Area Sabhas, are not being constituted by the many states. Many states are reluctant to do these. Many states do not believe in democratic decentralization and peoples participation. These should not be encouraged. Because of inadequate implementation M.P.C and D.P.C. economic, social, environmental planning and development are being suffered. As a result haphazard urban growth and irrational development growth is being encouraged and are not being empowered properly, so that they can be enabled to function as institutions of self government. 15th Finance Commission should also see so that the revenue base of urban local bodies is strengthened. More sources of revenue of centre and states are to be handed over to ULBs. 15th Finance Commission should make recommendation for some special grants to the ULBs as the cities and towns are the generator of

economic momentum. At least 70% of centre and state revenues is generated in cities and towns.

11. Mayor's powers are to be strengthened; as he is the first citizen of city. All states should give proper honour to this.
12. No cities should be politically victimized by the States and Centre as is being evident in Siliguri, West Bengal and many others cities.
13. Mayoral tenure in our country under the respective states should be not less than 5 years. All Mayors should be elected indirectly by the elected Councillors. Mayors should have enough powers to make priority of policies and to conduct the city governments. Imposition of any direction and priorities of centre and states should be discouraged.
14. Sharing of the burden of centrally sponsored and state sponsored projects by the ULBs should be minimized. Centre and States must share the cess and surcharge on petroleum products which is collected by them, with the urban local bodies.
15. Priorities of need of the developmental projects of centre may be varied. There should not be any imposition by the centre to States and States to the ULBs.
16. Constitution should be amended so that all the properties of state and centers come under the purview of property tax. Sub-soil rights of ULBs should be restored, in case of Telephone, Telegraph and Electricity Acts., which are to be amended in constitution or in any other laws. There is a need of standardization of Property Tax, states should provide necessary logistic support to the ULBs to improve tax collection management and efficiency. As urbanization is growing,

Revenue base
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supply of urban lands are being decreased, a clear cut land management policy must be framed by the states. Urban land is becoming as a valuable resource in the cities and towns, its proper use and management is very important.

17. Share of divisible taxes under the Central Finance Commission to the ULBs, should be enhanced, as the cities are the main source of revenue and GDP for both centre and states.
18. Many states have not yet transferred the Funds, Functions, Functionaries to the ULBs and many States are violating the 12th Schedule of the Constitution. Many states are creating parallel or parastatal bodies, to function as an alternative of ULBs which is totally unconstitutional. These practices should be stopped immediately. Recently in West Bengal one Municipal Corporation had been dissolved without giving any opportunity being heard, which is also unconstitutional.
19. All India Council of Mayors should meet the minister for Urban Development, Government of India and should draw his kind attention for his kind intervention, in these matters.
20. 59% slum dwellers of our country live in non notified slums, which areas cannot be covered under Prime Minister's Housing For All Project. Huge numbers of slum dwellers thus are being excluded from the advantages of centrally sponsored programmes. All the slums irrespective of notified and non-notified should not be excluded from the project of Housing For All and all the slums should be allowed to be covered under this project. Central government should advise to all

the states so that they can take an initiative for framing policy guideline to make all the non-notified slums, into the notified slums, at least where the dwellers have been living there for more than 20 years.

21. A new project for the basic infrastructural developmental works in the slums should be launched by the centre so that huge numbers of non-notified slum dwellers are also benefited.
22. Union government should take up the matters with the Reserve Bank, so that all the eligible SHGs are credit linked easily. Guidelines of NULM, particularly S.H.G. component, should be simplified and made implementable. All banks should be instructed, so that they can come forward.
23. All states should have a transparent policy for distribution of government grants to the urban local bodies, as per the provision of 74th Constitutional Amendment Act. States must have a transparent policy for distribution of funds to the ULBs. Many states are not following the recommendation of State Finance Commission formula for allocating the available funds.
24. Centre should see so that state governments cannot interfere into the affairs of ULBs and no-parallel functions by other government bodies should be allowed. All government officers who are deputed by the state governments in the urban local bodies are the officers of Municipal Corporation and they are under control of ULBs, not under State Government. This should be rigidly followed.
25. Centre and State government should encourage the sustainable development not the cosmetic development. Basic developmental

Democratic
decentralization.

works, developmental works for the slum dwellers irrespective of slums, should be allowed to cover in all the centrally sponsored scheme.

26. Government of India should introduce a new project under the style, alike National Slum Development programme.
27. Centre and states should come forward with a policy of controlling the green house gas emission, air pollution, impact of climate change on the cities, uniform policy of banning of plastic carry bags instead of any cosmetic development.

With these few words, I conclude.

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(ASOK BHATTACHARYA),
Mayor, Siliguri.