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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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Chairman

Seminar Organising committes

at

Jharkhand Environment Summit 2004

&

National Seminar on Environmental Regeneration

of

**Jharkhand with special reference to Damodar
Basin**

on

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**Respected Mahamahim Rajyapal ji, Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is a great privilege for me to deliver the key note address in Jharkhand Environment summit 2004 and National Seminar on Environmental Regeneration of Jharkhand with special reference to Damodar Basin.

The seminar has been organised with apparent objectives such as identification of potential environmental hazards, raising awareness about environmental degradation, conservation of the basic components of environment & ecology - land, air, water & bio-diversity, and sustainable environmental regeneration of Jharkhand.

The newly created state of Jharkhand with population of 2.69 crores and area of 79,714 sq kms may be termed as one of the most resource rich states of India. It has favourable land-man ratio of 338 persons per sq km. The state on the basis of its natural resources is destined to develop and acquire leading position on the development map of the country. Its vast mineral resources have been attracting the pioneers of industrial developments since early 20th century.

The state has more than 46% of the total mineral resources of the country. On the basis of the mineral resources industrial and mining activities in this region began as early as the beginning of the last century which resulted into an oasis of development in the midst of acute backwardness prevailing through out the state. It also caused serious stress and strain on environment and degraded the ecological system.

At present, almost entire state is suffering from environmental degradation in one form or other. The central part of the Jharkhand consisting of north chotanagpur region is facing the hazards of coal mining where as Kolhan area of west singbhum is

suffering from unabated iron ore mining. A large tract specially in and around Pakur and Koderma is under stone chip crushing activities where as in Palamu, Chatra and some other areas problem of land degradation has acquired alarming proportion. More over denudation of forest cover and destruction of vast bioresources are common phenomena across the state. The thermal power plants and large industries in the state are second to none in causing pollution on large scale.

It all is sequel to the policy of rapid economic development through extensive and intensive exploitation of natural resources. While economic development has enriched small group of people, it has resulted into tremendous suffering and misery to million of common people. It is in fact solely responsible for steady growth and continuous influx of rural people to cities and created a class of ecological refugees displaced by big dams, destruction of forests and other developmental projects. The environmental degeneration has imposed heavy burden on women, poor, landless and small and marginal farm families forcing them to wander for fuel, fodder and water in addition to house hold and agricultural works. As one problem is solved, ten new problems arise as a consequence of the first solution. These new problems are not consequences of incidental failures but of technological success.

Damodar river basin in the state of Jharkhand is a glaring example which raises fingers on the idea of such type of economic development and reminds us of Mahatma Gandhi's saying " **earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not for every man's greed.**" The river Damodar better known as sorrow of West Bengal till 1950 has become curse for the inhabitants of its basin who are forced to reel under the man made pollution of land air and water due to unplanned and inhuman practices of coal mining and power production.

The river Damodar, life line of Jharkhand shows a sorry picture of contradiction of the development. During British days, the Damodar was called as the "sorrow of Bengal" because of its extreme flood capabilities. However, the flooding capabilities of the river have been snatched away by construction of five dams along with reservoirs at Tilaiya, Konar, Tenughat, Maithon, Panchet and Durgapur Barrage. Unfortunately in the recent past the Damodar has become the "Sorrow of Jharkhand and Bengal" not because of its flooding capabilities but because of acute pollution of its water.

Damodar at present is known as one of the most polluted rivers of the world. Both the chemical and bacteriological pollution in it are very high. Some experts believe that the Damodar receives more pollutants than the Ganga keeping in mind the industrialization along its banks. There are the coal-based industries that dot the Damodar valley; mostly government-owned coal washeries ; coke oven plants; the country's major iron and steel plants; thermal power plants. Zinc, glass and cement plants. The pollution was caused by mine overburden, fly ash, oil, toxic metals and coal dust. Faulty mining practices, outdated processing practices and lack of proper maintenance were compounded by corruption; inadequate pollution control and state pollution control board that did nothing.

All these poisons are murdering the Damodar. While there is an ever increasing demand of its water from industrial and domestic users, there is less and less water. What's worse, even the available water is becoming increasingly unusable. But, unfortunately, what is even more visible today is the environmental catastrophe it has perpetrated. **There is no doubt about it, the Damodar is dying.**

The only way to save the Damodar valley is for these highly polluting industries to make massive investments in clean-up technologies or to switch to a new generation of cleaner

technologies, but the industrialists exploiting the area's resources are not willing to make the change.

The issues of conservation of environment and preservation of ecological balance in the state of Jharkhand in general and in Damodar basin particular have engaged the attention of thinkers, scientists and environmentalists alike. Serious studies worth rupees crores by eminent institutions, some of whom are represented in this seminar as well, have taken place in last decade but hardly of any use. In fact the problem is getting compounded day by day in spite of large number of enactments made after India's participation in Stockholm conference 1972 on the human environment organized by UN.

India is one of the few countries in the world which has made constitutional provisions for protection and improvement of environment by amending the constitution in its 42nd constitutional amendment. The article 21 of the Indian constitution is origin of Environmental laws in India.

The article 21 which read 'No Person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.' As per provision of Article 48 (a) of the constitution of India, "The state shall endeavor to protect and improve environment and safeguard the forests and wild life of the country. There after, plethora of legislative provisions have been made for environmental protection. Some of the important provision are, the wild life (protection) Act, 1972, Indian forest Act 1972, The forest (Conservation), Rule 1981, The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, the water (Prevention and control of Pollution) Act, 1974, the water (Rules 1975). The air (Prevention and control of Pollution) Act, 1981, The air (Prevention and control of pollution) Act 1981 and the air (prevention and control of pollution) Rules 1982.

Though some of the provisions of these legislations are very stringent and have specified the rights and duties of implementing agencies in no uncertain terms yet either because of laziness or due to their apparent connivance with the polluters teeth of the legislation have become ineffective causing agony and restlessness among the masses.

Such apathetic attitude of policy makers, administrators and environmental laws implementing agencies is now culminating into mass movements in various corners of the country. One such movement is in offing in the state of Jharkhand and West Bengal as well - the genesis being a strong voice, which has been raised against severe pollution of the river Damodar, better known as life line of development in Jharkhand & West Bengal.

With a view to create awareness about the impending disaster a study cum awareness march under the aegis of 'Damodar Bachao Andolan' was organized from village Chulhapani, which is the origin of Damodar on the hills of Latehar in Jharkhand to Kolkata in West Bengal, beyond which it merges into river Hoogly. The March began on May 29, 2004 on the eve of Ganga Dashahara and was concluded on June 5, 2004 on the World Environment Day. This unique March was in fact only the first step in the campaign to save the river from pollution. The representatives of several voluntary organizations, labour organizations and farmer organizations besides social activists, journalists, eminent scientists and most importantly the local inhabitants participated in this march.

This March was perhaps one of its kind in which a distance of 450 kms was covered at one go and mass awareness programmes were organised at more than 50 places. During the course of March the accompanying team of scientists collected samples of water, soil, flora-fauna and other aquatic life at different points from the river. These samples have been examined and tested in some of the reputed laboratories of the country.

Some of the experts and activists who were associated with the awareness cum study march through its length and breadth are also present in this seminar. I shall be falling in my duty if I do not mention their pioneer work of sample collection and primary data generation braving the scorching sun in the month of May. It was in fact a unique lab to land experience on which they will themselves throw light during their presentations in the technical sessions of the seminar.

I am also grateful to Mr. M. C. Mehta, Mr. C.V. Chelapati Rao, other dignitaries and experts who are present on this occasion. It is no denying the fact that without active participation of you all we could not have imagined success of the seminar.

I can't help myself from profusely expressing my most sincere gratitude to Mahamahim Rajayopal ji who has been since very beginning constant source of inspiration and encouragement to us.

Thanking you