

Jairam Ramesh says new CRZ notification will save Mumbai

Special Correspondent

MUMBAI: Union Minister of State for Environment Jairam Ramesh said over the weekend that the Coastal Zone Regulation (CRZ) notification 2011 would give a new lease of life to Mumbai and that it was the one last chance to save the great city. The new notification provided for redevelopment, which is monitored and audited by the government, and the Right to Information act, are applicable to it.

Mr. Ramesh who came to Mumbai to announce the provisions for the city, said that after a gap of 20 years, when the first CRZ notification was announced, special status was given to Mumbai, Goa, and Kerala, and for certain critically vulnerable coastal areas like the Sunderbans, Gulf of Mannar among other areas. He said India's 7,500 km coastline cannot have one law and "we must look at the special needs of Mumbai."

Anticipating flak from environmentalists, Mr. Ramesh said that the notification was not a capitulation to the builders' lobby; instead, it recognised the special needs of Mumbai and the enormous demographic and development pressures. "We cannot allow a slow death of the city and with the CRZ 1991 notification, the city would have bled," he said. It is a liber-

- **The new notification a challenge to implement, admits Union Minister**
- **'We need a pragmatic and practical CRZ which we have provided'**

alising of the CRZ, he said. "It is a safeguarded liberalisation and we are putting in checks and balances. If we find that the safeguards are violated, I will be the first to say enough. It's a huge gamble and we appeal to the Chief Minister and citizens to give this experiment a fair chance," he said.

"After a long gap, we have recognised the unique characteristic of Mumbai which is the only island city and we need a pragmatic and practical CRZ which we have provided," he stressed.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan said that the new notification was bold and revolutionary. Now Mumbai will not die like other great industrial cities and it got a new chance, he remarked, adding that the city would develop more responsibly and vibrantly keeping environmental concerns in mind.

Mr. Ramesh said that the old law was amended 25 times and admitted that the new notification was a challenge to implement. All violations of CRZ 1991 notification, where action was initiated, would be pursued, and viola-

tions like Adarsh society will not be condoned. The Ministry of Environment and Forests is issuing a directive on Monday under Section five of the Environment Protection Act to all States, to identify all CRZ violations and initiate action four months later. Goa is the only State which has mapped about 5000 violations, and if they are committed by five star hotels and holiday homes, they will not be condoned, Mr. Ramesh said.

In Mumbai, 146 slums in the CRZ-2 areas, which have 47,000 families can now go in for redevelopment. A total population of 5 to 6 lakh living in the Greater Mumbai CRZ 2 area will benefit. Thirty-eight Koliwadass or the settlements of the fishing community, will be declared as CRZ-3 instead of CRZ-2. This means no one other than the Kolis, who are said to be the original inhabitants of Mumbai, can carry out redevelopment in the area. Mr. Ramesh requested the State government to identify the families in slums and buildings and make sure they were not evicted.

The new rules provide for

large open spaces in Mumbai, like parks and play grounds, and these areas will be categorised as CRZ-3 which is a no-development zone. The no development zone, which was of 200 metres from the high tide line, is being reduced to 100 metres.

Now there are special safeguards for slum dwellers and no slum development can take place without the State government being involved, he said. The redevelopment has to be carried out by a special purpose vehicle where the Maharashtra government or its agencies has a 51 per cent share, and all this is subjected to the audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG). In the case of dilapidated buildings, the owners can carry out the redevelopment or give it to private builders, and RTI is applicable here too. It is for the first time that the law has stipulated the application of RTI for an essentially private activity, Mr Ramesh pointed out.

The redevelopment will be jointly monitored by a high level oversight committee of the State and the Central government, and there will be a concurrent audit. He said that the floor space index (FSI) in CRZ-2 was 1.33, and outside was 2.5; now the rules allow an FSI of 2.5, creating a uniform regime for slum and building redevelopment.