Chandigarh, December 20:- Small in size but big at heart! This holds true for Chandigarh whose ‘Open Hand’ symbol symbolizes the spirit of giving it to others. Sandwiched between Punjab and Haryana and admitting of little scope for horizontal expansion, Chandigarh has opened its heart out to its slum dwellers. Out of the 2,811 acres of net available land, the Chandigarh Administration has earmarked 356 acres for rehabilitation of slum dwellers, a gesture that has earned City Beautiful universal acclaim and first prize from the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh.

The issue of rehabilitation of slum dwellers, who, going by the script of the plan, will now be housed in 18 colonies at eight different locations across Chandigarh, is a perfect example of how innovative and imaginative policies integrated with IT, can help resolve even the most baffling challenge.

Chandigarh has a total area of 28,170 acres. Major part of the city, say about 19,389 acres, is covered by the residential sectors (from Sector 1 to 63). Then, Chandigarh has 1,272.56 acres of Defence land; 316.28 acres of railway land; reserved forest cover of 2,718.10 acres and Manimajra spread over 963.69 acres. All this totals up to 24,659 acres, leaving Chandigarh with only 3,511 acres of land located on the periphery.

With the IT Park being allotted 700 acres, the net available land works out to 2,811 acres out of which the UT Administration, living up to the spirit of the ‘Open Hand’ symbol, has given 356 acres, say close to 20 per cent, for resettlement of the slum dwellers. “Given the shortage of pricey land, it was indeed a herculean task for the administration to identify and earmark 356 acres of land for the rehabilitation of slum dwellers. The pressure on land in Chandigarh, the gateway to Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, is mounting by the day with City Beautiful emerging as a hub of economic activity”, said Mr. Sanjay Kumar, UT Finance Secretary.

The growth of Chandigarh as a commercial hub has pulled in lot of humans wanting to eke out a living by doing odd errands. This led to proliferation of slums and squatter settlements. Determined to provide quality of life in these slums, the Chandigarh Administration has launched a scheme to provide one-time sustainable solution to the dwellers.

“The new settlements would be fully integrated mini-townships with provision for dispensaries, crèches, aganwaris, schools,
community centres and services shops. Each block of 64 flats will have a common open area, regular drinking water supply, overhead water storage tanks, street lights, metalled roads and green parks with children playing equipment”, said the Finance Secretary.

The project is estimated to cost Rs 1,187 crore. Each dwelling unit will cost Rs 4.7 lakh and will be allotted on license fee basis. “The license fee worked out to more than Rs 3,300 which was found unaffordable for the poor slum dwellers and cried for subsidization. Hence, the UT Administration has decided to charge a token license fee of just Rs 1000 per month from each unit. It will just set off the management cost”, said an official of the Chandigarh Housing Board (CHB).

According to the findings of a survey, 23,841 slum families, consisting of more than one lakh people, have been found eligible for flats; 90 per cent of slum families are nuclear in size; the monthly income of 85 per cent ranges between Rs 1,000 and Rs 3,000; 81 per cent have been living in the city for more than 10 years and 35 per cent for more than 20 years.