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Most of India's urban poor are in Maharashtra

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MUMBAI: The overblown myth about the `city of gold' where poor migrants make their fortune has been dealt a blow by a recent report from the Union ministry of housing and urban poverty alleviation. Not only has Maharashtra been accorded the dubious distinction of being home to the largest number of urban poor in the country, it is also the biggest receiver of central government funds - almost 17% of the total amount - granted for the urban poor in the country's cities under the Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY) for the year 2009-2010.

The SJSRY is a unified centrally sponsored scheme launched in lieu of the erstwhile urban poverty alleviation programmes, namely the Nehru Rozgar Yojana (NRY), Prime Minister's Integrated Urban Poverty Eradication Programme (PMIUPEP) and Urban Basic Services for the Poor (UBSP).

This year, the ministry has set aside Rs 485 crore to help 50,000 urban poor to start individual or group micro enterprises for self-employment. It also intends to provide skill training to 200,000 poor individuals. A target of assisting 50,000 urban poor women has also been prescribed.

Maharashtra has received Rs 80 crore for its urban poor population of 1.46 crore - almost twice the amount received by Madhya Pradesh and five times the amount received by Bihar.

Uttar Pradesh ranks second in the maximum number of poor at 1.17 crore and draws Rs 64.62 crore from central government coffers. North-Eastern states, including Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Sikkim, Mizoram and Nagaland, are home to the least number of urban poor and collectively draw not more than Rs 1 crore for their upliftment.

Incidentally, Uttar Pradesh is home to the maximum below-the-poverty-line minority population at 4.70 lakh people, followed by Maharashtra's 3.33 lakh.

Experts say it is not surprising that Maharashtra - under all its glitter and status of a developed state - houses the maximum number of poor. "On the one hand, Maharashtra has claimed the status of a developed state and is ranked second or third in the human development index. But the maximum number of poor only points towards misplaced policies and government schemes. Rather than benefiting the lowest stratum of society, the government ends up downgrading its economic status and there is a huge difference between the claimed status of the state and what is on the ground," said Simpreet Singh of the National Alliance of People's Movement.

Organisations that work with slums also look at the fund allocation with scepticism. "Promises of funds are always made. But what amount is actually used? It remains to be seen

whether the money will actually get out of treasury and, if yes, how much," said Jockin Arputham, Magsaysay Award winner and president of the National Slum Dwellers' Federation (NSDF).