



Address

of

**Shri K. Rahman Khan,
Hon'ble Minister of Minority Affairs
Government of India**

in the

Annual Conference

of

State Minorities Commissions

13th January, 2014

New Delhi

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a matter of pleasure for me to be here and to have an opportunity to interact with the representatives of State Minorities Commissions at a single platform to develop synergy in the roles of the Government, Ministry of Minority Affairs, National Commission for Minorities and State Minorities Commissions for the cause of minorities in particular and the society at large. On this occasion, the esteemed presence of the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh ji, is a source of encouragement for all of us. It has not only enhanced the significance of the event but also shows the extant of commitment of the UPA Government towards the welfare and development of minority communities. I am personally grateful to the Hon'ble Prime Minister for taking time out of his busy schedule for this cause.

The minorities are an integral part of our society. India, as all of us know is a plural society consisting of various cultural, linguistic and religious diversities. It is not only a home of followers of those religions who had risen from this land, but also of those who had come from outside like Christians, Muslims and Zoroastrians. They came and completely merged themselves into the Indian society. It was basically a reason of our belief '*in live and let live*'. After independence, we enacted and adopted a Constitution, which proclaims India a sovereign, socialist and democratic republic and to secure for all its citizens social, economic and political justice. The Constitution provides full protection to the religious minorities living in India.

Under these provisions, the Indian Government had created a National Commission for Minorities followed by State Minorities Commissions throughout the country. As rightly said by our father of Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, that "a nation is known by the way it treats its minorities". In course of last 65 years, our country has become a model in this respect. We may proudly feel that India today has emerged as a well defined secular nation. To have a correct assessment of the socio-economic conditions of minorities in general and Muslims in particular, the UPA Government has rightly taken a great decision and had appointed Justice Sachar Committee, which has submitted its Report in 2006.

Sachar Committee in its report has pointed out towards extreme socio-economic backwardness of Muslims with high poverty incidence, low literacy rates, low levels of employment, economic deprivation, high security risks etc. Even in case of some socio-economic indicators, Muslims fall behind SCs/STs. In such a situation, the Ministry, National Minorities Commission and the State Minorities Commissions have immense responsibility to safeguard the Constitutional and developmental rights of minorities.

I firmly believe that for effective and efficient service delivery, understanding between the Ministry, National Commission for Minorities and the State Minorities Commissions is a must. Service delivery, we know, in a fragmented, un-coordinated fashion where various role players go about in the delivery of services in a unilateral manner without them being part of a comprehensive, coherent strategy, would have great difficulty in meaningfully responding to the needs of Minorities. We have to work in tandem to reverse the trends. State Minorities Commissions may become our eyes at the implementation level to ensure that minorities get their rightful dues.

As you all may be aware, the Ministry of Minority Affairs is the youngest Ministry of Government of India, created in 2006 with a mission to ensure a focused approach towards issues relating to the minorities and to facilitate the formulation of overall policy, planning, coordination, evaluation and review of the regulatory framework and development programmes for the benefit of the minority communities. The Ministry has a tremendous responsibility to ensure development and growth of 22 crore plus minorities of India.

As a follow up of Sachar Committee Recommendations, the Ministry has taken actions for the welfare of minorities by ensuring Access to Education; Skill Development; Access to Credit; Special Area Development Initiatives; Measures for affirmative action; Waqf-related issues; and other miscellaneous issues for Muslim community. Simultaneously, for development of all minority communities, the Ministry adopted a multi-pronged strategy with focus on educational empowerment; area development; economic empowerment; women empowerment; development of vulnerable minority communities and strengthening of minority institutions.

Under this mandate, the Ministry has made intensive efforts to assist education of minorities at all levels through Pre-matric, Post-matric, Merit-cum-means based Scholarships for professional and technical courses and Maulana Azad National Fellowships for research. The coverage of the Scholarship Schemes in the last four-five years has increased manifold. Under the Pre-matric Scholarship Scheme, introduced in 2008-09, the coverage has increased 13 times whereas under the Post-matric Scholarship introduced in 2007-08, this increase is more than 33 times. The coverage of beneficiaries under the Merit-cum-Means based Scholarship has increased 4 times since its inception in 2007-08.

The Ministry of Minority Affairs is a pioneer in developing On-line Scholarship Management System (OSMS) for the Post-matric and Merit-cum-Means based Scholarship Schemes which is being operated since last 2 years. The total process of implementation of these Schemes is done on-line and thereby ensuring transparency and accountability with clear-cut defined roles and responsibilities of all the stakeholders under the schemes.

During the 11th Five Year Plan, the scholarship schemes have been a great success and Rs.2672 crore have been disbursed to more than 1.4 crore minority

students. More than 30% of them were minority girls. During the first year of 12th Plan period, that is 2012-2013, Rs. 1360 crore have been disbursed to support education of more than 72 lakh minority students under the Scholarship Schemes.

The Ministry has also taken action on Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) through Aadhaar Bridge Payment System under the Post Matric Scholarship and Merit-cum-Means Based Scholarship Schemes. Moreover, the Ministry is making all-out efforts to expand scholarships to make it demand-driven. A new scheme of Interest subsidy for overseas studies with the name “Padho Pardes” has also been launched by the Ministry during the current financial year. The Ministry is also exploring the feasibility to provide higher education among minorities.

In order to strengthen the efforts towards educational empowerment, the corpus of Maulana Azad Education Foundation (MAEF), an autonomous body under the Ministry, has been raised from Rs.750 crore to Rs.1250 crore during the 12th Plan. MAEF awards scholarships to meritorious minority girls and supports development of educational infrastructure of private institutions.

For infrastructure development under Area Development strategy, the Ministry has two major programmes, namely, Prime Minister’s New 15-Point Programme for minorities and Multi-sectoral Development Programme (MsDP). This over-arching programme envisages specific interventions with definite goals to be achieved in a specific time frame. The programme aims for enhancing opportunities for education, ensuring an equitable share in economic activities and employment, improving living conditions through infrastructure development for minorities and prevention and control of communal disharmony.

Through the Prime Minister’s 15-Point Programme, the Central Government ensures equitable allocation of resources for development of minorities by earmarking 15% of targets/outlays under important flagship development programmes of the Government of India, like Indira Awas Yojana, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Priority Sector Lending, Aajeevika, Swarn Jayanti Shahri Rozgar Yojana, JNURM etc.

On the other hand, the Multi-sectoral Development Programme, the flagship programme of the Ministry for area development, aims at improving the socio-economic conditions and basic amenities for improving the quality of life and reducing imbalances in rural and semi-rural areas of identified Minority Concentration Districts (MCDs). Under MsDP, identified “Development deficits” are addressed through “Specific Plans” for provision of better infrastructure for education, sanitation, housing, drinking water and electricity supply besides income generating activities.

Considering the demand of the community, during 2013-14, MsDP has been restructured for sharper focus in minority concentration areas, and extending the benefit to 710 Minority Concentration Blocks and 66 Towns, which have been

identified on the basis of socio-economic indicators. Social Audit and concurrent monitoring of Area Development schemes/programmes have been envisaged during current Plan period.

In order to enhance economic development of minorities, the National Minorities Development & Finance Corporation (NMDFC) provides concessional loans to minorities through its State Channelizing Agencies (SCAs). During the 11th Plan Period, a total amount of Rs. 977.21 crore was disbursed to 4.6 lakh beneficiaries under Term Loan and Micro Finance Schemes. During 2012-13, a sum of Rs. 371.09 crore was disbursed to 1.05 lakh minority beneficiaries. During the current year, so far a sum of Rs. 230.46 crore has been disbursed to 49,000 minority beneficiaries.

To strengthen the economic empowerment, the Ministry has launched an important scheme “Seekhoaur Kamao” during current financial year for Skill Development of Minorities. The scheme guarantees minimum 75% employment of trained minority youths and out of them 50% will be in organized sector.

During 2013-14, the Ministry aims to upgrade skills of 75,000 minority youths with an amount of about Rs. 150 Crore under three verticals namely, MsDP, “Seekhoaur Kamao” scheme and Schemes of NMDFC. The Ministry has already sanctioned training of 29,906 minority youths in 29 States/UTs. NMDFC has also signed a MoU with Maruti Suzuki India Limited (MSIL) for imparting “Driver’s Training to persons belonging to Minority Communities”.

The Ministry has recently launched a unique scheme with the name “Jiyo Parsi”. The scheme is for containing population decline of Parsis in India.

Towards women empowerment, the Ministry has started implementation of a scheme “Nai Roshni” for Leadership Development of Minority Women from 2012-13 with the objective to empower and instill confidence among minority women by providing knowledge, tools and techniques for interacting with Government systems, Banks and other institutions at all levels.

The constitution of Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) is under active consideration of the Government. EOC will ensure equal access to opportunity, entitlements/ rights to deprived groups belonging to minority communities.

There are large areas of waqf lands in the country either encroached or lying idle, not being used purposefully. To improve the management of Waqf properties and streamline the functioning of State Waqf Boards, the Waqf (Amendment) Act 2013 has already come into force from September 2013. Among other provisions, the Amendment Act strengthens Central Waqf Council (CWC).

I take the privilege to inform you that Government has approved the establishment of a new National Wakf Development Corporation Limited (NAWADCO) which has been incorporated. I am glad to inform that the Hon’ble

Prime Minister will be launching NAWADCO shortly. This is an ambitious initiative to finance the development of Wakf properties for public purposes throughout the country.

Since 2009, the Ministry is working on computerization of records of State Waqf Boards and developed a web-enabled portal software called Waqf Management System of India (WAMSI) to develop centralized database for all State Waqf Boards.

A National Data Bank (NDB) is set upto maintain disaggregated data for various socio-religious communities (SRCs) which is to be collected by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) to enable the evaluation and assessment of flow of benefits to minorities on a regular basis. A NDB web-page has been created on the website of MoSPI which at present contains 97 tables on population, education, health and labour and employment.

For smooth flow of information from the Ministry, this year we have launched a dedicated Toll Free helpline with the name “Khidmat (1800-11-2001)”to assist the minority population throughout the country. Now everybody can reach us on all working days between 9:00 and 6:00 p.m.

The Ministry is also looking into recommendations of Justice Ranganath Misra Commission for identification of socially and economically backward sections among religious and linguistic minorities and to recommend measures for welfare.

The Government is actively considering the inclusion of Jains in the minority community so that the benefits of welfare schemes run by the Government of India could be extended to the Jain community also.

I have attempted to highlight the important initiatives and activities of the Ministry, but I am sure that there may be many issues and concerns of the Minority community which may also need immediate attention by the Ministry. I would urge upon all the State Minorities Commissions to become our eyes and ear at the delivery level and assist the Ministry to take up the unattended issues of Minority Communities. The Ministry would feel obliged and leave no stone unturned for the cause of minorities.

*******Jai Hind*******