

Suggested Policies and Programmes for Consideration of Congress Government (2014-2019): Empowerment of Minorities

Preamble

The Indian National Congress has always believed in affirmative action for all religious minorities including Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis and Jains and linguistic minorities. We have remained committed to protecting their rights and our secular nationalism is founded on a celebration of India's many diversities.

The Congress-led UPA Government constituted the Sachar Committee in 2005 to report social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community in India. A separate Ministry of Minority Affairs was constituted in 2006 to ensure focused interventions to deal with issues relating to the minorities and to facilitate their development. The Prime Minister's New 15 Point Programme for the Welfare of Minorities was launched in June, 2006 to ensure equitable allocation of resources for development of minorities by earmarking 15% of target/outlays under important flagship development programmes of Government. The districts with more than 20% Muslim population were identified for special attention under different programmes. Educational empowerment of minorities is an avowed objective for our Party.

The minority welfare programmes and policies of the Indian National Congress have begun to show significant results, like increase in education levels, financial inclusion, etc.

The Open Manifesto Process

The Indian National Congress has pioneered an entirely new way in which political party election manifestos are prepared. It is our firm belief that the Indian National Congress Manifesto must reflect the voice and aspirations of the people and a new vision for the country. There were several consultations held across the country over a five-month period (from October, 2013 to March, 2014) with different stakeholders, to get their inputs on India's future growth, development and inclusion agenda.

In keeping with the belief of Congress party leadership that the party's manifesto must reflect the voice and aspirations of the common people, widespread consultations were held with various minority communities. The Congress Vice President Shri Rahul Gandhi personally interacted with the representatives from Minority communities from all over the country.

In addition to this a dedicated website (www.incmanifesto.in) was established to invite suggestions from all citizens for the Manifesto.

We received many suggestions through these consultations on the websites and social media platforms, phones, emails, etc. These suggestions were carefully considered and have been included, wherever feasible.

We believe this unique exercise has made the Manifesto inclusive and fully reflective of the voice of the people of India.

Major Achievements of the Congress Party for the Empowerment of Minorities

1. The Ministry of Minority Affairs was created on 29th January, 2006 under the Congress-led UPA to ensure a more focused approach towards issues relating to the Minorities.
2. The Prime Minister's 15-Point Programme for Welfare of Minorities was set up to focus on their education, health, employment, housing, safety etc.
3. Today the Minorities have 43,52,000 bank accounts in 121 districts of the country. The total volume of lending stands at Rs. 66,500 crore. Ten years ago, minorities had 14,15,000 bank accounts. The total volume of lending was just Rs. 4,000 crore.
4. Education has been a major focus for the Indian National Congress. The enrolment of Muslim children at the primary level has increased from 9.4% in 2006-07 to 14.2% in 2012-13; this has exceeded the share of Muslims in the country's population. Enrolment at the upper primary level has also gone up from 7.2 percent to 12.1 percent during the same period.
5. Several scholarship Schemes have been started, where 30% of scholarships are reserved for girl students ensuring proper focus on redressing gender imbalance in education. The total beneficiaries under these Schemes are around 3 crore.
6. The Congress-led UPA instituted the Multi-Sectoral Development Programme. The Programme has been implemented in 90 minority districts of 20 States and UTs.
7. The Indian National Congress has launched new programmes for skilling minority men and women; Nai Roshni is a Scheme that aims to build the capacity of women to provide them with knowledge, tools and techniques for interacting with Government systems, banks, intermediaries etc. Seekho Aur Kamao (Learn & Earn) is a Skill Development Initiative for Minorities
8. Maulana Azad Taleem-e-Balighan has been launched to impart functional literacy, basic education, vocational skill development and continuing education to cover about one crore Muslim adults in the age group of 15 years and above.
9. More than 24.77 lakh houses have been constructed for minorities with an expenditure of Rs. 8,276.69 crores under Indira Awas Yojna (IAY).

10. The welfare and protection of minority children have also remained an area of focus for us. Around 70,106 Anganwadi Centres operationalised in minority concentration blocks under Integrated Child Development Scheme.
11. The Waqf Act has been amended with effect from 1st November, 2013 for improving the management of waqf properties and streamlining of functioning of State Waqf Boards.
12. National Waqf Development Corporation (NAWADCO) has been set up for developing the potential waqf properties of about 6 lakh acres in the country.
13. Computerization of records of State Waqf Boards is being undertaken. 2,81,427 waqf records have been computerised and pre-digitization work of 1,15,518 waqf properties completed thus far.

The Detailed Action Plan 2014 - 2019

The Indian National Congress will focus on accelerating concrete, sustainable and long-term plans for the welfare of the Nation's Minorities.

The Indian National Congress has always been at the forefront in promoting schemes for the welfare of minorities. A separate and dedicated Ministry of Minority Affairs was established under the first Congress-led UPA Government. Since then many far-reaching programmes in various sectors have been implemented with significant results.

1. Numerous scholarships have been distributed to children belonging to the minority community. The Corpus of the Maulana Azad Education Foundation has been more than tripled to over 700 crores in an attempt to encourage candidates from the minority communities to pursue opportunities in higher education. This work will be continued so as to ensure that no child who applies for educational support is denied a scholarship at any level.
2. To encourage entrepreneurship ('Priority Sector Lending' disbursement for minorities has steadily increased), we will continue to ensure that members of the minority communities have easy access to credit and other incentives like tax rebates etc.
3. For the effective management of Waqf properties and in realisation of the specific promise made in 2009, the Congress-led UPA Government became the first Government to pass a law providing clear guidelines to prevent the usurpation and mismanagement of Waqf properties. The Indian National Congress pledges to continue with this programme.
4. The Communal Violence Bill which was drafted and introduced by the Indian National Congress will be passed as a matter of priority.
5. The Congress-led UPA Government has taken steps to address the conditions of backward minorities by providing for reservation in educational institutions and in Government employment. We will pursue this closely in the Supreme Court and ensure that the policy is implemented through proper legislation.

6. We will work to create a ready corpus, along the lines of the Maulana Azad Educational Fund for young entrepreneurs. Skills development programmes for minorities which have been carried out successfully in various districts, will be implemented across the country.

7. While much work has been done to implement the recommendations of the Sachar Committee, the Indian National Congress will work tirelessly to ensure that every single recommendation is reviewed and efforts are made for their implementation.

The promises detailed above reflect the Indian National Congress' commitment towards the empowerment of Minority communities, in response to the wide range of aspirations articulated by these communities in our consultations. We recognize that there are some more expectations expressed by these groups, which will continue to guide the Indian National Congress' efforts towards their development. The Indian National Congress is committed to finding a way forward towards meeting all such expectations of these groups, by putting in concerted efforts, as detailed below.

1. Extension of Scheduled Caste status to all Dalit Minorities
2. Examine feasibility of mandating the next Delimitation Commission to ensure that Minorities aren't disenfranchised through reservation of constituencies where minority population equals or exceeds SC/ST population
3. Ensure adequate representation of Minorities in all public positions
4. Ensure that funds earmarked for Minorities are allocated to various minority groups in a population-proportionate manner
5. Earmark reservation of 4.5 percent for backward Muslims in the existing OBC reservations
6. Ensure adequate representation of minorities in student and faculty in educational institutions
7. Establish a Minority Commission in every state to safeguard the interests of minorities
8. Undertake special awareness drives to educate Minorities about government schemes for their benefit
9. Ensure improved accountability mechanisms for proper implementation of government schemes for the welfare of minorities
10. Press for implementation of former Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi's letter to state chief ministers to ensure that Waqf properties illegally occupied by state and Central governments are vacated and restored to the State Waqf Boards
11. Ensure utilization of funds allocated for the publicity of Madrasa Scheme (SPQEM) in Urdu and other languages
12. Ensure implementation of Central Urdu Teachers Scheme across states
13. Empower Equal Opportunity Commission to check discrimination against Minorities in employment and education opportunities
14. Institute a Committee to enquire into the socio-economic status of all Minority groups, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Muslims to ensure equitable access to government benefits for the welfare of Minorities

Appeal

We appeal to all our friends from the Minorities community to support the INC so that we can fulfill the promises made in the Election manifesto to the minorities communities.

For the Indian National Congress, a Manifesto is more than a catalogue of promises and pledges to be forgotten after elections are over.

It is an agenda for governance to be followed diligently and meticulously.

It is an agenda for good governance on which progress must be reported to the people of the country, regularly, in a transparent manner.

It is in this spirit that the Congress-led UPA government has been releasing a “Report to the People” every year. This will continue.

The 2014 Lok Sabha elections will offer stark choices.

On the one side is the Indian National Congress with its long track record of achievements and accomplishments, with its vision and values bequeathed to it by a most remarkable generation of Indians led by Mahatma Gandhi.

On the other side is an ideology of hate, bigotry and prejudice, an ideology that negates the very idea of India that has been cherished by us for centuries.

On the one side is the Indian National Congress, which celebrates and rejoices in the multitude of diversities of India.

On the other side is an ideology that seeks to impose uniformity in the name of unity.

A vote for the Indian National Congress is a vote for fulfilling the aspirations of the youth of our nation, for ensuring that women lead a life of dignity.

Economic growth, social harmony, empowerment of weaker sections and strengthening of democratic institutions have to all go hand-in-hand.

It is only the Indian National Congress that will, by its very character, ensure that this happens.