

Suggested Policies and Programmes for Consideration of Congress Government (2014-2019): Empowering Youth and Students

Preamble

The Indian National Congress believes our youth is our biggest asset. In the 1980s, Rajiv Gandhi gave the youth of India the 'Right to Vote' by reducing the voting age to 18. When the Lok Sabha passed this Bill, he said it was "an expression of our full faith in the youth of the Country". He also brought about the Information Technology revolution in order to facilitate the growing aspirations of the youth of this nation. In the past decade not only have we actively encouraged young leadership and political opportunities for all but also remained committed to creating an enabling and rewarding environment to build the capacity of our youth to take on roles more actively in our country's future. We spend more than Rs. 90,000 crore across various schemes for the youth, and we will only increase this.

The Indian National Congress has been unequivocal in its emphasis and support for providing affordable and quality education. We strongly feel that education is a 'great equalizer' and that an inclusive and accessible education system is an essential foundation for an equitable society. We also believe that it is the right of every student to have a voice in decision-making that moulds our education system.

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.

The National Students' Union of India (NSUI) and Indian Youth Congress (IYC) held widespread consultations with students and youth across the country to channel their views and aspirations into the Manifesto of the Congress party.

To this end, NSUI initiated hundreds of consultations involving college, district and state units across the country. Inputs were also received in writing as well as via social media platforms. NSUI also created a web portal exclusively for the manifesto consultation process, and thousands of ideas and suggestions were received through this portal.

Similarly, the Indian Youth Congress engaged in extensive deliberations across the country through its State Units and organized several consultations and discussions with youth across different walks of life and social groups. A consultation exercise was organized in Bangalore where a diverse group of youth from across the country interacted with Congress Vice President, Shri Rahul Gandhi and shared their thoughts and aspirations. In addition, written feedback forms and responses via emails, text messages were also sought online. Youth connected with the Nehru Yuva Kendra have also contributed their suggestions and ideas in this process.

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.

Achievements

1. The UPA Government has formulated the National Skill Development Mission in 2008-09 to contribute significantly to overall target of skilling/upskilling 50 crore youth in India by 2022.
2. Under UPA I and II, the per capita public expenditure on education increased from Rs. 888 in 2004-05 to Rs. 2,985 in 2011-12.
3. We enacted the Right to Education Act 2009, which provides for free and compulsory education for children between the ages of 6 and 14. As a result, enrolment of children at the primary education stage has now reached near-universal levels. 1.98 lakh primary schools and 1.1 lakh upper primary schools have been constructed.
4. More than 10 crore children benefit from Mid-Day Meal Scheme annually. More than 26 lakh cook cum helpers are currently engaged to prepare and serve mid-day meals to the school children.
5. A scheme for construction and running of girls' hostels for students of secondary and higher secondary schools in about 3,500 educationally backward blocks of the country was launched in November, 2008.
6. The actual enrolment in Higher Education grew from 16.6 crore to 25.9 crore during the 11th Plan period. The Gross Enrolment Ratio for Higher Education went up from 12.3 percent in 2006-07 to 17.9 percent in 2011-12.

7. Central Universities increased from 17 to 44 during 2004 to 2013. Almost each State now has at least 1 Central University. In the period after 2004-05, the number of IITs has increased from 7 to 16 and the number of IIMs from 6 to 13. Five new IISERs have been established. The number of Indian Institutes of Information Technology has also doubled to 4.
8. The National Mission of Education through ICT aims at ensuring high speed broadband connectivity to universities and colleges and providing access devices at low cost. About 400 universities and more than 19000 colleges have already been provided connectivity under the Mission.
9. With the aim of providing at least one NIT in each of the larger States/ UTs, the Government has since established 10 new NITs at Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Goa, Delhi, Uttarakhand and Puducherry (as of 2011-'12).
10. The Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development was upgraded as an Institute of National Importance.
11. A set of special initiatives, including the skill development and employment Scheme called "Himayat" and the special industry initiative, known as "Udaan" have been launched for the youth of Jammu and Kashmir. Himayat aims to train 1,00,000 youth in 5 years and provide atleast 75% of them with jobs. "Udaan" aims to target 40,000 youth in 5 years.
12. The UPA Government has launched the Panchayat Yuva Kheela Utkarsha Abhiyan to promote sports and nurture talents at the block and village levels by ensuring universal access to basic sports infrastructure.
13. Rs. 142.47 crore was spent on 732 athletes under Operation Excellence for London Olympics, 2012" to improve India's medal count in the Olympic Games.
14. Skill acquisition was introduced as an additional component for 30,000 volunteers of National Service Scheme in 2011.
15. The National Youth Corps (NYC) scheme has been launched to tap the potential of the youth for channelizing their energy towards nation building. Under the scheme, 17600 volunteers, including 7098 volunteers in Jammu & Kashmir have been selected, trained and deployed in different districts across the country so far.

The Detailed Action Plan 2014 - 2019

The Indian National Congress will continue to focus on youth capacity building, education, leadership and development. Opening up the political system and giving a voice to each and every young Indian will continue to be a priority area.

Building the Best Education System in the World for our Students

The Indian National Congress has been unequivocal in its emphasis and support for providing affordable and quality education. We will continue to keep education on the very top of our development agenda.

Education is the backbone of human development and is vital to ensuring equal social, political and economic opportunities for all citizens. We enacted the Right to Education Act 2009, which provides for free and compulsory education for children between the ages of 6 and 14. As a result, enrolment of children at the primary education stage has now reached near-universal levels. 1.98 lakh primary schools and 1.1 lakh upper primary schools have been constructed. Under UPA I and II, the per capita public expenditure on education increased from Rs. 888 in 2004–05 to Rs. 2,985 in 2011–12. Our focus will now be on improving the quality of education- we will move from “SarvaShikshaAbhiyan” to “SarvshreshthShikshaAbhiyan.”

1. The Indian National Congress will strengthen the implementation of the Right to Education Act to ensure quality learning outcomes, adequate infrastructure and facilities in school, regular teacher training and an optimal Pupil Teacher Ratio. We will also ensure quality in teacher training by making suitable investments and amendments to regulations, wherever required.
2. We will enhance focus and resources on the implementation of the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan, to improve quality of secondary education. We will achieve near universal enrolment in secondary education with a Gross Enrolment Ratio of 100% by 2019.
3. The Indian National Congress will place a special emphasis on reducing the drop-out rate particularly in middle and secondary levels.
4. We will establish an independent regulatory mechanism to oversee State and private institutions to ensure standardization and quality of education.
5. We will support regional and context specific curriculums as well focus on developing life skills including leadership building.
6. We are committed to the cause of special education. We will provide special measures for children

with special needs and disabilities. We will also award priority to developing infrastructure for differently-abled persons.

7. The Indian National Congress will take systematic steps to address issues relating to discrimination against students from the North East and Jammu and Kashmir.
8. We will continue to place a special focus on ensuring educational access to civil strife affected areas and the North East region.
9. To focus on higher education, we launched the Rashtriya Uchhatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) to provide strategic funding to improve college and university infrastructure. RUSA will help create 70 new universities, provide infrastructure in current universities, upgrade autonomous colleges to Universities, and create a new model of general degree colleges and professional institutions.
10. The Indian National Congress will set up a 'National Commission for Students', a body which will protect and promote the interest of students. This commission will review the constitutional and legal safeguards for students, recommend remedial legislative measures, facilitate redressal of grievances and advise the government on all policy matters concerning students.
11. The Indian National Congress will continue to expand its support to providing interest-free educations loans to students at all levels especially to weaker sections of society.
12. The Indian National Congress is committed to exploring the possible partnerships with the private sector in the delivery of education. New PPP models will be explored and appropriate regulation systems, accreditation procedures, policies and incentives will be developed, to enable private education providers to take on the challenge of expanding and improving secondary education, in particular.
13. Indian National Congress will establish a National Youth Commission, which will be a professional and dedicated focal point for youth development in all aspects.
14. We will establish a central students exchange programme to encourage National unity.

Promoting Sports

The Indian National Congress remains committed to ensuring that sports opportunities are expanded and made more available and accessible to the youth.

Love of sports invigorates the soul of the Nation; its youth. It breeds competition and fair play. We will strive to be a Nation where sport in all its forms is promoted and encouraged.

1. Due to the UPA-II's recent efforts India has been reinstated as a member of the International

Olympic Committee. The Indian National Congress will continue to clean up sports administration. We will ensure active involvement of former sportspersons in sports administration.

2. The Rajiv Gandhi Khel Abhiyan launched by the Congress-led UPA government will be implemented to ensure high quality sporting facilities in every block of the country.
3. A National Sports Education University will be set up to educate students of exceptional talent. There would be a team of experts who would be continuously scouting for talent in every sport across the country in the age-group 8-15 years. It will have world class coaches and facilities.

Other Youth Issues

The Indian National Congress will promote social inclusiveness, employability and entrepreneurship development among the youth.

1. The Indian National Congress will provide a special youth development package (entrepreneurship/employment) for Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected areas with special focus on women and SC/ST.
2. We will start a special drive for recruitment from North East and Jammu & Kashmir for aspirants in Railways, Indian Army and other central government departments.
3. The Indian National Congress remains committed to eradicating the problem of drug abuse. A nation-wide assessment of the prevalence of this problem will be undertaken. Funding will be adequately provided for drug-rehabilitation centres which will be set up in each district by 2020.
4. The National Service Scheme, launched by the Congress-led UPA government for graduates, aims to enhance IT literacy, financial literacy, English communication and other soft skills; to make the youth more employable. The Indian National Congress is committed to increasing funding and reach of this scheme while prioritising its implementation.
5. We will seek to ensure priority to differently-abled youth with respect to education and employment opportunities.
6. We will set up government run employment exchange/ facilitation centers for youth seeking foreign employment opportunities. These will help curtail middlemen/fraudulent recruiting agencies. The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs will be the nodal agency.

The promises detailed above reflect the Indian National Congress' commitment towards the empowerment of students and youth, 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. Provide an increased focus on IT for education using internet and mobile technology at scale such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC).
2. Provide a legislative framework for compulsory elections to student unions in all private as well as Government institutions across India.
3. Develop a model law to frame guidelines for the establishment of VidyarthiPanchayat, an open forum for students and authorities to resolve grievances and participate in decision-making.
4. Establish A 'National Research & Development Fund' to encourage innovation in all streams of education.
5. Institute National Students and Youth Exchange Programme to encourage National unity
6. Ensure that all public educational institutions in India publish details of faculty engaged and budgets online as mandated under Section 4 of the RTI Act.
7. Frame a model law against ragging and discrimination in education institutes.
8. Establish a Central Educational Information Centre that will function as a portal to information on all institutions, courses, fees, fellowships, scholarships, schemes etc in the country.
9. Institute a 'Teacher Assessment Mechanism' linked with performance incentives to improve quality of teaching in the country.
10. Promote counseling cells in all educational institutes to enable students to make informed education and career decisions. Offer personal counseling to students to help them cope with the high demands of work, education and personal life.

11. Strengthen Employment Exchanges for improved placements, through better coordination with the private sector.
12. Provide recognition of courses offered by registered 'Madrasa' on the same lines as other educational institutes.
13. Ensure that Equal Opportunity Cells for SC, ST, OBC & Differently-Abled students are set up in all education institutes as per UGC guidelines.
14. Provide tax concessions to youth between the age of 18-35
15. Ensure speedy closure of proceedings of under-trial prisoners below the age of 35. Institute a review of all existing under-trial prisoners and institute mechanisms to provide bail wherever prisoners are in jail for inability to provide bail surety or where time spent in jail is already greater than sentence if convicted.
16. Ensure that the 5% reservation in public employment is provided for Persons with Disabilities
17. Provide special incentives to private companies who employ a significant number of Persons with Disabilities.
18. Strengthen the Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008 and ensure its effective implementation.
19. Set up a High Level Committee to examine the need for reservations for SC, ST and OBCs in private sector and also to formulate appropriate modalities for enforcing quota system in private sector..
20. Institute national program for HIV Positive youth to address their education, employment, rehabilitation and health needs in mission mode.
21. Accord priority to fund Micro Small and Medium Enterprises started by Youth in the age group of 18 to 35 years
22. Undertake special recruitment drive to fill backlog vacancies for persons with disabilities particularly for persons suffering from blindness and low vision in terms of section 33 of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995

Appeal

We appeal to all our student and youth friends to support the INC so that we can fulfill the promises made in the Election Manifesto

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.