India - A Welfare State

As a welfare State, India is committed to the welfare and development of its people, particularly the vulnerable sections like the scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs), backward classes, minorities and the handicapped. This section of the society constitutes nearly 85% of the population.

**Welfare of the SCs, STS, Backward Classes and others**

Almost a quarter of India's population consists of SCs and STs, who had been grievously neglected for centuries. The government has taken several steps for their welfare. The representation of the SCs and STs in all Parliament and State Assemblies is assured.

Under the Special Assistance scheme, nearly 300,000 families were expected to benefit during 1994-95. There is a Special Component Plan for the SCs. The central government participates in the share capital investment of the Scheduled Caste Development Corporation, set up in the states. The National SC and ST Finance and Development Corporation is a 100% government-owned no profit no loss corporation for developing entrepreneurial and other skills of this section.

**Tribal girl from Bastar**

To deal with the problem of scavengers, called Safai Karmacharis, a National Commission for Safai Karmacharis has been set up. There is a National Scheme of Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers. Scholarships are offered to SC/ST students who can also draw from the Book Banks. They also receive coaching for civil services examinations and professional institutions through special centres across India.

The Tribal Sub Plan strategy and Special Central Assistance programmes aim at improving the lot of the STs. Under the 20-point programme, over one million ST families were assisted during 1994. A Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) has been set up with its turnover in 1994 crossing Rs. 173 crore. For the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), the government has announced a 27% reservation in civil services and posts. A National Backward Class Finance and Development Corporation has also been set up.

**Minorities**

The minorities have received a new deal with the establishment of the Minorities Finance and Development Corporation in September 1994. It will primarily benefit the backward sections amongst the minorities. The Central Wakf Council takes up the
job of developing Wakf properties. A 15-point programme for the welfare of the minorities is being implemented. It also needs to be stressed that there is no bar against practicing any religion in India.

Children and Drug Abuse

A National Policy on Children was adopted in 1974. It states that the nurture and solicitude of the children is the responsibility of the States. In line with the UN Declaration on the Right of the Child, India enacted the Juvenile Justice Act 1986. India became the first country to adopt that legislation.

The midday meal scheme provides basic nutrition to children

There are over 450 day care centres, old-age homes and mobile medicare units. Over 60 units also function for the welfare of street children. A Central Adoption Resource Agency has been set up to function as the clearing house of information on children available for adoption.

There are 359 counselling centres for drug abuse prevention, which also propagate awareness. The government finances 250 NGOs which are involved in drug abuse prevention activities. A tripartite agreement between the government, ILO and UNDCP has been signed to help full rehabilitation and recovery of drug addicts.

Family Welfare Programme

India has 2.4% of the world's land, but supports 16% of the entire global population. According to the latest (1991) census report, India has a population of 846.30 million. Since the last census (1981), the country's population has increased by 150 million. Thus the task of eradicating poverty is a daunting one, indeed.

But the latest census figures have also brought some hope and indicated that efforts being made in the field of family welfare have not entirely gone waste. For the first time, the growth rate of population has declined from 2.22% (in 1981) to 2.14%. The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), which was 140 per 1000 live births in 1981, came down to 80. The death rate declined sharply from 15 per 1000 to 9.6. The Eighth Plan goal is to achieve a birth rate of 7 per 1000, IMR of 70 and death rate of 9 per 1000. The life expectancy is expected to hit 64 from 58 years at present.

Health workers ensure primary health care to both mother & child

In view of the close relationship between high birth rate and high infant mortality, various child and mother health care programmes are being implemented. In 1992, a Child Survival and Safe Motherhood Programme was launched to provide for universal immunisation and safe motherhood initiatives. NGOs are being given increasing support in an effort to involve the community for promoting spacing
methods to stabilise the population. Innovative programmes which use the local dialect and folklore have been prepared under the Information, Entertainment and Communication scheme. The target of these programmes is the low performing States and districts.

**Rural Health Services**

The Government is paying increasing attention to integrated health, maternity and child care in rural areas. An increasing number of community health workers and doctors are being sent to rural health centres. Primary health care is being provided to the rural population through a network of over 150,000 primary health centres and sub-centres by 586,000 trained midwives and 410,000 health guides.

**Housing and Urban Development**

Various policies and initiatives of the Government have put the country on the threshold of a major qualitative and quantitative change in the housing and urban development sector. The target is to ensure a minimum level of shelter and basic amenities by the year 2001 AD.

**Integrated Rural Development Programme**

The Integrated Rural Development Programme provides practical assistance to economically deprived families; the upgradation of skills via the Training for Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM) will cover 600 families in each block. In 1983, ten million such families were covered. The National Rural Employment Programme gives direct wage employment by utilising labour power to build durable community assets. In the field of agriculture, the management of non-irrigated, rain fed agriculture (which constitutes 73 per cent of the country's cropped area) has led to the identification of around 4,246 watersheds. 46 of these have already been taken up by various agricultural institutions and universities. One such agricultural institution is the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), which mobilises resources and provides credit to the rural sector.

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