

Tour Report

Visit to Chandigarh, Rewalsar and Shimla by Smt. Spalzes Angmo and Shri H.S. Hanspal, Hon'ble Members from 16th November, 2009 to 20th November, 2009

In order to assess and monitor the welfare schemes for the minorities as well as to review the prime Minister's 15 Point Programme. Shri H.S. Hanspal and myself undertook a tour to Rewalsar (Himachal Pradesh) from 16th November, 2009 to 20th November, 2009.

REWALSAR:

After a fruitful tour of Chandigarh, Punjab, we reached Rewalsar on the 17th late evening accompanied by the protocol officer Mr. Anil Sharma provided by the Himachal Government. This small town of Rewalsar nestled among the mountains is a sacred pilgrimage town for Buddhists and Sikhs.

The place assumes significance because of its association with Guru Padma Sambhav who travelled to Tibet from here and preached Buddhism. Therefore, Rewalsar is thronged by devotees and pilgrims from all over the world.

An interactive meeting of both officials and the representatives of the minority communities took place on 18th November attended by the SDM and CMO/ Tehsildar and other officials. The Buddhist representatives complained of their inability to get scheduled Tribe certificates because their religion and tribe were not recorded in the revenue papers due to which they had to face immense difficulties in all spheres.

One of the major grievances put forth by the Buddhist community in Rewalsar was the constant burning of prayer flags by unknown miscreants from the local population from time to time. Prayer flags are sacred symbols of Buddhism and such acts instilled a sense of fear and insecurity among the Buddhist pilgrims who come here in large numbers from all over the country and abroad too. Whether such acts are done to intimidate the Buddhist minority who constitute the second largest minority in the state, is a question to be raised. The Buddhist community mainly concentrated in the Lahual Spiti-Kinnaur belt of Himachal Pradesh regard Rewalsar as one of the most sacred pilgrim sites of the state. Therefore, the state administration should take effective steps to put an end to this so as to maintain peace and harmony in the state.

The Sikh representatives pointed out the non-awareness of the schemes meant for minorities. They also stressed upon the need for proper sewage and drainage system around the lake. Keeping in view of the large pilgrims of both Buddhists and Sikhs coming to Rewalsar, the health department is in dire need of additional doctors to be permanently posted so that it could cater to their health needs.

SHIMLA: MEETING WITH CHIEF SECRETARY AND STATE OFFICIALS:-

We arrived in Shimla on 18th November, 2009 by late evening and had a detailed, comprehensive meeting with the Chief Secretary and State officials regarding the implementation of the Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme for the welfare of the Minorities. The Director, Social Justice and Empowerment welcomed us and appraised us that the population of minorities in Himachal Pradesh is 4.44% out of which Muslims constitute the largest having a population of 119512. The Buddhists come second with around 75859 followed by Sikhs 72355 and Christians 7687 and Parsis 37.

The State Government has constituted a Minority Welfare Board under the Chairmanship of the Chief Minister and 22 non-official members belonging to Minority Community. The present board is conspicuous by the absence of a Buddhists representative even though Buddhists constitute the second largest minority after the Muslims. In spite of the presence of this Board and the various State/ District level committees under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary still there is a need for setting up of a State Minority Commission, representing all minority communities.

Under the various schemes for the welfare of the minorities especially in the field of education, the State has taken the endeavor of improving access to education with the provision of **23 mobile schools** for the Gujjar community. These were being identified according to the population of the minorities.

We wanted to know the exact figures of enrollment of the minority communities which the state has yet to send to the commission. We laid stress on the education of the girl-child. It is also stressed upon to appoint more women from minority community under the **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** Schemes as Anganwadi workers and helpers. Scholarship schemes for minority students were being implemented and a proposal of 1400 eligible students for various scholarship schemes involving a total amount of Rs. 45.61 lac has been sent for sanction. Yet it does not meet the total target of 4380 students.

FREE COACHING AND ALLIED SCHEMES:-

The following proposals were sent to Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India for sanction which is still awaited:-

- | | |
|--|------------|
| 1. HIMN Academy Hamirpur | 15.45 Lacs |
| 2. H.P. University, Shimla | 8.62 Lacs |
| 3. Idara Ishahul Fikar Society
for Social Reforms, RamNagar Mandi | 29.77 Lacs |

The Ministry of Minority Affairs, Govt. of India has conveyed approval of Rs. 5.64 lacs to Idara Ishahul Fikar Society for Social Reforms, Masjid complex Beleouganj, Shimla and released an amount of Rs. 2.82 lacs as 1st installment.

HIMACHAL PRADESH MINORITY FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION:

HPMFDC is the state Nodal agency of the (NMFDC) to give financial assistance to persons belonging to socially and economically backward minority communities. The corporation is providing for the following schemes:-

Term Loan	Margin Money Loan
Micro Credit	Small Business
Educational Loan	

During the Current heads it has extended loan to 82 no. of beneficiaries against target of 110.

It was strongly felt that the corporation needed to reach out to the Buddhist Minorities in the inaccessible backward region of Lahual Spiti, Kinnaur especially during the summer season and hold awareness camps there so that they could avail these schemes and make themselves economically self reliant. Since this region remained inaccessible due to the intense cold climate, efforts have to be made to do underlying justice to the theme of giving social, economic and educational upliftment to the socially and economically backward minority communities.

PREVENTION OF COMMUNAL INCIDENTS:-

The Secretary (Home) informed us that there was complete harmony in the State though I did mention to the Chief Secretary regarding incidents of burning of Buddhist prayer flags in Rewalsar 7-8 months ago. We were completely shocked when we came to know later while returning to Chandigarh, that in Rewalsar again some miscreants had burnt Buddhist Prayer flags. I immediately spoke to the Chief Secretary on phone, who assured me that a inquiry would be done and a report would be sent to the Commission.

On arrival at Delhi the Secretary, National Commission for Minorities also wrote to the Chief Secretary regarding the burning of prayer flags and the insecurity felt among the Buddhist Community been able to catch hold of the miscreants. On the 15th January, 2010 again there was another incident of prayer flags being burnt. The State Government should have to do more than this to stop such incidents so that a feeling of security and well being is restored among the Buddhist community of Himachal Pradesh.

MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF MINORITY COMMUNITY:

1. The representatives of the various minority communities wanted effective implementation of the schemes under the Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme.
2. The Muslims wanted a Haj Committee to be formed.
3. The Chairman be appointed for the Wakf Board for the smooth functioning of the Board.
4. The Sikh representatives demanded that even though they are living in Himachal Pradesh for the last more than 40 years, some of them having been born in Himachal Pradesh but still could not buy piece of land in their name. Hence necessary act be amended so that the minorities living in the state can get land registered in their names.
5. Sikh representatives demanded that the compensation to some of the victims of 1984 riots had not yet been paid.

RECOMMENDATIONS:-

1. There should be a State Minority Commission having representation of all minority communities. Inclusion of Buddhist Member in the Minority Welfare Board, since there is none at present.

2. Buddhist prayer flags a sacred symbol for Buddhists should be given due respect and due action should be taken against miscreants who have repeatedly burnt prayer flags at Rewalsar so that the harmony may be maintained and the Buddhist community gains a feeling of security and well-being in the state. Since Rewalsar is a sacred pilgrim centre for Buddhists the tranquility of the place should be maintained by respecting the religious sentiments of minority communities.
3. The Buddhists residing in different parts of Himachal Pradesh and in the region of Lahaul Spiti –Kinnaur are facing difficulties in procurement of scheduled tribe Certificates because of the fact that there was no proper religion or tribe identity in the land revenue records of their forefathers. This proved a major obstacle in the procurement of Scheduled Tribe Certificates. Therefore, a need for proper religion / Tribe identity in the forthcoming census to be held in 2011. The commission would like to share the format for collecting data which would accurately record the religious identity of citizens.
4. Awareness programmes need to be undertaken by the State Government and effective measures to highlight scholarships schemes and loan disbursement schemes. Special drive should be made in areas like Lahaul Spiti, Kinnaur where so far these schemes have not been availed of due to inaccessibility factor. To target the socially and economically backward minority communities is the underlying theme of these financial aids and it must percolate to the poor and needy among the minorities.
5. The Chairman of the Wakf Board to be appointed so that the Board functions effectively. Also a Haj committee should be appointed, as per the aspirations of the Muslim community.
6. Introduction of Bhoti Language as third language in all schools till Class VIII under the three language formula.
7. Appointment of Urdu and Punjabi teachers.
8. Encroachments on cemeteries and graveyards of Christians in the state needed to be stopped, and dealt with sternly.
9. Victims of 1984 Sikh riots to be given due compensation.
10. Basic infrastructure like road connectivity proper drainage and sewage and beautification of Rewalsar needs to be given priority.
11. Mid-Day meal scheme should be introduced in Madarasas.

(Spalzes Angmo)
Member
19.02.2010