

WBMDFC: Major initiatives for the minorities

The need was increasingly felt by the Government of West Bengal to create minorities' development & welfare department, which would conceptualise, evolve and execute different development and welfare programmes for the minorities of the state of West Bengal. With the increasing range of its activities the state government has allotted a sum of Rs. 13.00 crore during the financial year 2006-2007 against 6.00 crore during the financial year 1997-1998, the year when this department had started functioning as a full-fledged department. The major thrust areas under execution of this department are briefly discussed below.

Self-employment programme

The West Bengal Minorities' Development and Finance Corporation (WBMDFC) was established in 1996 mainly to promote self-employment opportunities in various trades and activities and to develop entrepreneurship through infrastructural and financial help from the state government as well as from National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation. The target groups are mainly the backward sections of the minorities. Since inception the WBMDFC has disbursed 143.80 crore among 45,325 beneficiaries for self-employment activities. The Corporation has organised 30 different training courses for 656 trainees so that they can develop their skills for income generating activities.

Muslim Girls' Hostels

Lack of education among the Muslims, particularly among the Muslim women, is an important factor for their social and economic backwardness. To promote higher education among Muslim girl students in remote areas in the districts a scheme for construction of Muslim Girls' Hostel is being implemented. As many as 10 such hostels have been constructed in the districts of Kolkata, Burdwan, Birbhum, Paschim Medinipur, Malda, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin

Dinajpur, North 24 Parganas and Murshidabad and two such hostels are under construction in the districts of Hooghly and Nadia. An amount of Rs.2.46 crore has been released for such constructions. At present about 900 students can be accommodated in these hostels.

Stipend for Meritorious Minority Students

In order to promote higher education among the poor and meritorious minority students a scheme to award stipend to such category of students has been taken-up in the year 1999-2000, Primarily these stipends have been disbursed through Board of Wakfs, West Bengal in the name and shape "Stipend to Meritorious and Poor Muslim Students" till 2003-2004. Now the WBMDFC has been entrusted with the task of administering the scheme. So far an amount of Rs. 1.05 crore has been disbursed among around 7,524 beneficiaries so that they can prosecute higher studies.

West Bengal Urdu Academy

The West Bengal Urdu Academy has been established in 1978 to promote the Urdu language and literature by printing and publishing Urdu Books for students and academicians, running a Urdu Library with rich collection of rare Urdu literary works by the reputed scholars of Urdu language and literature and conducting different courses like Urdu type-writing, calligraphy, kitab training, language training etc. The said Academy distributes stipend to the meritorious students for prosecuting higher studies in Urdu and confers awards on eminent scholars and authors for their literary achievements. Lately, the Academy has undertaken printing of text books in Urdu language.

West Bengal Minorities' Commission

The West Bengal Minorities' Commission is a statutory body under the administrative control of this department to perform, amongst others, the following functions:

- (a) to make recommendations for effective implementation and enforcement of safeguards provided for the linguistic and religious minorities in the Constitution as well as the central and the state laws;
- (b) to review the implementation of Government policies and programmes in respect of minorities; and
- (c) to study and suggest additional social, economic, educational and cultural requirements of the minorities.

Quite a few problems being faced by the individuals/organisations belonging to minority communities have been resolved at the intervention of the Commission. Besides, the recommendations/suggestions put forward by the Commission are given due consideration by the State government. A good number of them have been accepted/acceded to.

Recently the Commission has entrusted the Indian Statistical Institute with the task of conducting a survey of the socio-economic condition of the minorities in terms of education, health, representation in employment etc. The findings of the research would go a long way in formulating various schemes for development and welfare of these communities.

Board of Wakfs, West Bengal
Wakf is a permanent dedication of a person professing Islam in the name of Almighty. To manage those properties, a statutory body namely "The Office of Wakf Commissioner" was constituted as per provisions in the Bengal Wakf Act, 1934. In the year 1995, a Central Act namely, "the Wakf Act, 1995" came into force in 1996. The Board of Wakfs, W.B. was constituted as per the provisions in the said Act. The said body has been reconstituted in the year 2001.

At present the said Board is administering 8,044 wakf estates out of which survey has been completed in respect of 4,046. The Board with their economic and infrastructural resources is promoting education among the students of Muslim Community. Apart from this they have taken steps for development of Child health in collaboration with UNICEF.

Moreover, the Board has been entrusted with administering day-to-day works of the Muslim Girls' Hostels, constructed with the grant of the state government.

For determination of any dispute, question or

other matter related to a wakf or wakf property, the state government has established a Wakf Tribunal which has started functioning w.e.f. 01.04.2002 under a presiding officer who is a member off West Bengal Higher Judicial Service and not below the rank of a District or Sessions Judge.

Other Programmes
Apart from these, this department has undertaken the scheme for construction of boundary walls surrounding Muslim/Christian/Buddhist graveyards/cemeteries through district authorities, mainly to prevent encroachment of the graveyards as well as to maintain their

sanctity. This scheme is being implemented since the year 1998-1999. So far, an amount of Rs. 253.00 lakh has been sanctioned for construction of 45 such boundary walls out of which five are under construction while the rest have been completed.

The WBMDFC has been disbursing "Interest-Free Education Loan" to the poor and meritorious minority students for undertaking technical and professional education from the financial year 2003-2004. So far, an amount of Rs. 137.00 lakh has been disbursed among 240 such beneficiaries. ■

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