



Development with Dignity must be agenda of our nation: Vice President

Delivers 10th Annual Lecture on National Commission for Minorities

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The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that the Development with Dignity must be the agenda of our nation and bringing a bill in Parliament won't change many things unless we have political will and administrative skill. He was delivering the 10th Annual Lecture on National Commission for Minorities on the theme 'Minorities in Nation Building', here today. The Union Minister for Minority Affairs, Shri Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

The Vice President said that the notion of pluralism, inclusion and peaceful co-existence have to be the cornerstones of our governance. He further said the Minority Commission is mandated to suggest and devise appropriate measures for their socio-economic development of minorities. The Commission has the underlying principle of inclusive growth ensuring that the benefits of political democracy reach those who are likely to be left out, he added.

The Vice President said that it is the principle of 'Antyodaya', the empowerment of the weakest, the farthest and the smallest. He further said that India is built on the four important pillars given by our Constitution - Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, adding that, the strength of these pillars determines the strength of the superstructure, the grand India we are building. The role of minority groups in nation building has been phenomenal and they could do this because they gave predominance to their identity as Indians, he added.

The Vice President said that once "we keep the national interests at the top of our development agenda, the other factors become less important". He further said that equal opportunity must be given for everyone to learn, earn and grow into active citizens is crucial and we must grow into a learning society as well. "Irrespective of caste, creed, region, religion and language, we are Indians first," he added.

The Vice President said that one must introspect and identify divisive, destructive, demeaning tendencies and aberrations. He further said that we must also collectively overcome them with grit and determination. Internal tensions are counterproductive and we must channel our rich human resources to productive ends, towards nation building," he added.

Following is the text of Vice President's Lecture:

"I am happy to deliver the 10th Annual Lecture of National Commission for Minorities on 'Minorities in Nation Building'.

We have laid the foundations of our nation seventy years ago and are constantly building India on the four important pillars given by our Constitution - Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. The strength of these pillars determines the strength of the superstructure, the grand India we are building.

As Dr. Ambedkar mentioned in his closing speech of the first Constituent Assembly in 1949, "Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life".

Dr. Ambedkar had exhorted us to "realize the necessity of becoming a nation and seriously think of ways and means of realizing the goal". This has been the inspiration for the governments over the last seven decades. We have tried to strengthen the four pillars and usher in social democracy by attempting to build an 'inclusive' nation. We recognized that ours is a country that has multiple religions, multiple languages, multiple castes, multiple tribal groups. Yet, we have a common rich heritage of over a few millennia, a common struggle for political independence and a common destiny we have chosen to follow from 1947.

We recognized that as a nation, the notion of pluralism, inclusion and peaceful co-existence have to be the cornerstones of our governance. Our Constitution-makers have given us this grand vision of what our nation should look like. In order to realize the vision, over the last seventy years, we have enacted legislations, created institutions and embarked on a continuous quest to improve the quality of social democracy.

One aspect of these efforts is to respect, protect, preserve and celebrate the diversity in our country.

Our Constitution contains numerous articles that guarantee basic freedom. Article 25 of the Indian Constitution gives to all individuals the right to practice and profess religion subject to public order and morality. Articles 29 and 30 contain provisions that safeguard the interest of minorities as far as education, language and culture are concerned.

As an institutional mechanism for ensuring that Constitutional safeguards are adhered to, the National Commission for Minorities was set up in 1992. The Commission is also mandated to suggest and devise appropriate measures for their socio-economic development. The underlying idea was to reach out to those population groups whose voice may not be heard because there are too few members in a particular group. It is felt necessary for national development that needs and aspirations of these groups, as well as, their rights and freedoms should be a part of the national discourse. **It has the same underlying principle of inclusive growth and ensuring that the benefits of political democracy reach those who are likely to be left out. It is the principle of 'Antyodaya', the empowerment of the weakest, the farthest and the smallest.**

While the State has been making its efforts to address the problems and concerns of minority groups and support their efforts towards socio-economic development, the minority groups have also been in the forefront of shaping India. In fact, they have made extraordinary contribution to the building of a vibrant, industrial India, a strong and secure India and an agriculturally self reliant India.

As I mentioned, we all share a common history of freedom struggle and during the course of that struggle, we had forged a new Indian identity. The freedom saga includes illustrious names like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Hakim Ajmal Khan and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and Barakatullah. We have icons like Shaheed Bhagat Singh and Bhikaji Cama, Dr. Dadabhai Naoroji and Sir Pherozeshah Mehta.

We also remember the pioneering work done by eminent academicians like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, whom Gandhiji called "the Prophet of Education" in establishing colleges and universities. Numerous examples of colleges and universities include Aligarh Muslim University, Hamdard University, St. Stephen's College, St. Xavier's College, Loyola College, and Stella Maris College just to name a few.

Out of the 14 Presidents of India, five were from minority communities - Dr. Zakir Hussain, Mohd. Hidayatullah, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, Gyani Zail Singh and Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. Three of the thirteen Vice Presidents of India have been from the minority groups: Dr. Zakir Hussain, Mohd. Hidayatullah and Mohammad Hamid Ansari.

Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, popularly known as the Missile Man of India and the Peoples' President, is one of India's most respected scientists and the father of the Integrated Guided Missile Development Program of India.

The field of medicine is another area in which the minority groups have made a significant contribution to the welfare and the common good of India. Many internationally recognized institutions include Jamia Hamdard University; the Christian Medical College Hospital, Ludhiana, founded by Dr. Edith Brown in 1893; the Christian Medical College Hospital, Vellore, which grew out of Dr. Ida Scudder's roadside clinics, in 1895.

The father of white revolution in India - Dr. Verghese Kurien and Jamshedji Tata who was in many ways the father of Indian industrial development were from the minority groups. The Parsis were the first to set up modern theatre in Bombay. India's shipbuilding and steel industry owe their rapid growth mainly to the Wadias and the Tata family.

The Sikhs have made a major contribution to strengthen India's defence capability because they constitute 20% of India's armed forces. They are also the group that made the green revolution possible and eventually gave India much of its current home grown food security.

Among the great pioneers in various fields are Homi Jehangir Bhabha, the father of India's atomic energy program and Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw who led the Indian forces in the 1971 war against Pakistan. Distinguished legal luminaries like Nani Palkiwala, Soli Sorabji, Nariman, to name only a few, also belong to the minority groups.

Our country is richer because of the contributions to art and architecture, music and dance made by various groups. Our heritage dotted with temples, mosques, churches, Viharas, Stupas, Gurudwaras and monasteries is a fascinating tapestry of human excellence.

The role of minority groups in nation building has been phenomenal. They could do this because they gave predominance to their identity as Indians. We all have multiple identities based on our religion, language, caste, creed, gender and a number of other aspects. If we can relegate them to the background and say proudly that we are Indians first, true national development will take place. If the other identities surface, there is a potential wall that is built. **These narrow domestic walls need to be dismantled, as Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore reminded us. Irrespective of caste, creed, region, religion and language, we are Indians first.**

However, this does not mean we have to abandon our roots, our individual languages and beliefs. Far from it. We should nourish them because they nourish us. In the Indian world view, there is an inherent respect for diversity. **We believe that we are one nation because the bonds that bind us together are stronger than the differences between ourselves.** However, occasionally we tend to magnify these differences and that erodes social cohesion and progress towards national development. Once we keep the national interests at the

top of our development agenda, the other factors become less important. This is exactly what the visionaries and stalwarts I mentioned did. **They had the courage to dream big for the country they lived in. They left an indelible mark on the country they loved. This is the emotional bond that needs to be further strengthened.**

Ours is the largest democracy and our Constitution contains an incredibly inclusive vision of our nation.

We have a duty to translate this **caring and sharing vision** into a reality by **co-opting all groups, however small, in the task of nation building.**

Equal opportunity for all to learn, earn and grow into active citizens is crucial.

We must grow into a learning society as well.

We must introspect and identify divisive, destructive, demeaning tendencies and aberrations. We must collectively overcome them with grit and determination. Internal tensions are counterproductive.

We must have the wisdom to amicably live together and grow together.

We must channel our rich human resources to productive ends, towards nation building.

Development with Dignity must be the agenda of our nation. Bringing a bill in Parliament won't change many things. We need political will and administrative skill.

Anybody who is taking the path of terror is not human. Terrorism in any form is no acceptable.

We think in terms of the upliftment of the poorest of the poor.

Secularism is safe in India not just because of the constitution. It is part of our DNA. We inherited it from the *vedic* days.

Our country has no history of attacking anyone. India was the knowledge center of the whole world. We believe in the philosophy of harmony. We must tell our youth about our past. Unless everyone contributes country cannot prosper.

I congratulate the National Minorities Commission on its commendable work and wish it continued success in its efforts to reach out to all the minority groups and creating favourable conditions for their active involvement, participation and contribution to the nation.

Jai Hind.”

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