New Delhi
March 12, 1980

Dear

I am writing to convey to you the deep concern of the Government of India about the problems of the Scheduled Castes and the high priority that we attach to the task of their rapid socio-economic development.

I am writing separately about the measures to be taken to deal with the atrocities or crimes on Scheduled Castes, which have been occurring in large numbers and have sharply increased in the last 3 years. There is a clear nexus between the economic plight of the Scheduled Castes and the atrocities and social disabilities to which they are subjected. For example, many of these crimes are intended to terrorise and cow down the Scheduled Castes when they seek their wages for agricultural labour or try to cultivate the lands legally allotted to them. A permanent solution to this situation must be based on the rapid economic development of the Scheduled
The proportion of Scheduled Castes in the poverty population of India is much larger than their proportion of 15 percent in the total population. They are characterised by below-the-poverty-line economic status, poor asset ownership general dependence on agricultural labour, subsistence farming, share-cropping, leather work and other types of low income occupations; preponderance among bonded labourers; and subjection to social and civil disabilities.

In my inaugural address to the conference of State Minister in charge of Backward Classes Welfare in April 1975, I had emphasised the responsibility of the different department in executing programmes relevant to the Scheduled Castes. That conference recognised the needs of the Scheduled Castes and recommended that each department should identify programmes relevant to the Scheduled Castes in each sector and quantify the benefits that should be made available to them. I understand that most State Governments have formulated Special Component Plans for Scheduled Castes as part of their State Plans.

The special component plan, already prepared by the State Government, have not only to be improved quantitatively and qualitatively but should also be implemented satisfactorily. Satisfactory implementation will require not only attention to programmes but also a clear cut personnel policy consisting inter-alia of orientation of officers of Departments concerned with development towards the needs of the Schedule Castes and their careful selection, training and continuity of tenure. The objective of the various development programmes in the Special Component Plan should be to enable Scheduled Castes families in the States to cross the poverty line.
within a short and specified period, if possible at least half of them in this Plan period itself. For this purpose, it is particularly important to take note of the developmental needs of the Scheduled Castes in each occupational category, identify the available opportunities suitable for them, formulate appropriate developmental programmes in the light of the above and build these programmes, and corresponding outlays into the Special Component Plan. In this context, an illustrative list of possible programmes in the important sectors for different occupational categories of the Scheduled Castes is enclosed. It is important that the programmes and outlays in the Special Component Plan do not represent small token provisions, but should be adequate to cater to a substantial proportion of the number of Scheduled Castes families in the relevant occupational categories.

The Scheduled Castes Development Corporation, which is another important instrument for the development of Scheduled Castes, should be activated and made effective in the field. Close linkages should be established between the sectoral programmes in the Special Component Plans and the Scheduled Castes Development Corporation activities. There are also a number of other programmes for the Scheduled Castes which are wholly or partly funded by the Central Government. The State must take full advantage of them by preparing programmes and providing matching funds wherever prescribed.

You will hear in greater detail from the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Planning Commission. You should see that the task of the development of the Scheduled Castes receives the highest priority from your State Government and gets the benefit of your personal attention and guidance. Please keep me informed of the
action and the progress from time to time. A Conference with focus on the progress of the economic development of the Scheduled Castes may be held some time later.

Yours sincerely,

INDIRA GANDHI

TO

The Chief Ministers and Governors of the State under President's Rule (List attached)

Illustrative list of programmes for the development of Scheduled Castes especially economic development in the Special Components Plans.

(1). For the Scheduled Castes agricultural labourers, who comprise 52 per cent of all Scheduled Castes workers in the Country:

(i) Animal Husbandry programmes including dairying in a viable package, with linkages with Operation Flood II and other Livestock programmes, fodder, veterinary services etc.;

(ii) Similar schemes for poultry, piggery, goat rearing, sheep breeding etc., in a viable package;

(iii) Sericulture, again in a viable package specially formulated to meet the need of the Scheduled Castes agricultural labourers.

All these programmes for the agricultural labourers should be taken up on a sufficiently large scale so as to enable at least half the Scheduled Castes families to cross the poverty line within the Plan period.
II. For Scheduled Castes cultivators who constitute 28 per cent of all Scheduled Castes workers in the country:

The Scheduled Castes cultivators are mostly share-croppers, tenants, marginal and small farmers. They generally have land holdings of low quality and inferior cropping patterns and inadequate inputs. The following programmes required to be taken up for them:

(i) The comprehensive development of all land holdings of Scheduled Castes in the State with the provision of Irrigation facilities wherever surface or ground water resources are available. In order that this makes a significant impact the programme has to be taken up on a substantial scale through a systematic listing of all Scheduled Castes holdings. Necessary inputs like credit, electricity, pump sets, etc. should also be suitably linked.

(ii) Specific and significant coverage of the Scheduled Caste cultivators in all agricultural production programmes. This will involve provision of inputs like short-term credit, seeds, fertilisers etc. every season and services like marketing assistance, storage etc.

III. Programmes for other categories including fishermen artisans etc.:

In certain parts of the country Scheduled Castes are generally in specific occupational groups in large numbers. Thus for example fishermen in the Eastern region and weavers in the Western are wholly or mostly from the Scheduled Castes. Almost all leather workers all over the country and producers of many handicrafts products in various parts of the country are also of the Scheduled Castes. It is necessary to take a total view of their problems in each category, formulate suitable
programmes and implement them effectively. These would include:-

(i) Special comprehensive project wherever there is a large number of Scheduled Castes—be they fishermen, weavers, leather workers or other artisans like basket and mat workers, cane and bamboo workers, etc.

(ii) Specific programmes for the improvement of the skills of the Schedule Castes in Cottage and Village Industries.

(iii) Provision of raw material banks/linkages, training in appropriate technology to create/upgrade skills, common facilities and work places, market linkages/assistance subsidies etc.

IV. Programmes for those engaged in so called occupations like cleaning of dry latrines:

Though their proportion among Scheduled Castes is small, this category need attention on account of the human aspects of their working conditions. They have to be trained and rehabilitated in alternative occupations simultaneously with a programme for converting dry latrines into water-borne latrines. Meanwhile their working living conditions should be improved.

V. Education reducing the literacy gap of the Scheduled Castes and drop-out rate:

Though considerable progress has been made in the educational development of the Scheduled Castes, there is still a wide literacy gap between the Scheduled Castes and the rest of the population and drop-out rate is higher among them. These problems are particularly acute among those Scheduled Castes who are agricultural labourers, subsistence farmers and artisans. Programmes for bridging the literacy gap of the
Scheduled Castes require to be brought into the Plan and seriously implemented. Higher enrolment and lower drop-out rates through a scheme of payment of opportunity cost to the Scheduled Caste families who depend on the labour of their boys and girls to contribute to even subsistence level income: special emphasis on the education of girls; making adult education programmes more meaningful and relevant to the Scheduled Caste specially by providing information inputs pertaining to economic development opportunities and facilities; locating a good number of Adult Education Centres and new schools in Scheduled Castes mohallas/localities as in instrument of social integration.

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