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**India's young demographic strength highlighted by G-20 Chair at Labour Ministers' Conference in Australia**

“India is one of the most youthful population of the world. 58% of our population is below the age of 29 years. The population dependency ratio is declining and is expected to rise only after 2030,” said Shri Narendra Singh Tomar, Union Minister of Labour & Employment in his address to Labour Ministers of G-20 countries. The fact was also acknowledged by the G-20 Chair during the Labour and Employment Ministerial conference of G-20 Nations, held on September 10-11, 2014, at Melbourne Australia. The Labour Ministers of the major 20 economies in the world are discussing the global issues relating to labour in this two-day conference.

Shri Tomar added, “One of the key requirements to boost labour market participation rate is to minimize the skill mismatch in job market by enhancing the skill base of the workforce in emerging economies like India. Structural unemployment and underemployment are biggest challenges on account of the mismatch between demand and supply factors of employment and rigidities in the labour market.” He elaborated that Government of India is adopting multipronged strategies to address it from both demand and supply side. From the supply side, creation of local jobs and development of SMEs have been identified as the doorways to reduce structural unemployment. M/o Labour & Employment has started a scheme on “Demand Responsive Vocational Training”. Under this scheme, any industry can sign an MOU with Government to conduct training programme to meet specific skill requirement of the company which would ensure minimum 80% employment in any local industry. From the demand side, emphasis is given to creation of appropriate skill sets among the rural migrant and urban poor. We are in favor of labour mobility, skill portability and harmonization of skills qualification framework for a paradigm shift of laborers from low skill based work to high productivity jobs. Evolving National Vocational Qualification Framework is one of key pre-requisites to ensure that skills and qualifications match new job requirements. Skill Development Initiative Scheme, based on Modular Employable Skill (MES) framework has been in operation to provide vocational training to early school leavers and existing workers, especially in unorganized sector. Government of India is taking proactive measures to create employment opportunities for people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups through 21 Vocational Rehabilitation Centers. A national Scheme ‘Recognition of Prior Learning of Construction Worker’ has been prepared by MoLE to evaluate skills and knowledge acquired informally and addresses them through Skill gap training for 15 days. Active labour market policies (ALMPs) in our country are recognized as an important strategy. Under National Career Service (NCS) project, Public Employment Exchanges are being revamped into Career Counseling Center for assessing local job scenario and organizing job fairs for efficient placement. Government of India is taking affirmative policy measures to simplify the labour laws. “We believe that G 20 can serve as a policy platform for exchanging best practices and knowledge sharing for creation of better jobs and boosting participation in the World of Work,” said Mr Tomar.

Mr Tomar also mentioned that Industry and commerce are the two areas having maximum potential of employment. We feel that employers have a big role to play to address our concern of jobless growth. Therefore, this G20 conference besides appealing to governments should also appeal to employers that in addition to profit-earning, they should focus more on employment generation in the course of their business expansion.

While speaking in a session on “Creating better jobs”, Shri Tomar further said, “Employment generation is India’s biggest challenge today. In the last decade, the rate of employment growth was less than 1%. Youth unemployment rate is 6.6% and underemployment rate is touching 5.7%. Every year almost 10 million people enter labour force in India. A large informal sector, lower participation of women in labour force, increasing the productivity of labour and providing social protection to the vulnerable sections are our main challenges. Creation of commensurate health and educational infrastructure for them is our highest priority so that we can reap our demographic dividend for growth and prosperity.”

Government of India is taking various initiatives in consultation with all stakeholders. “We are working to enhance productivity of labour force through vocational training. We have set up Mentor Councils to revise the curricula according to the needs of Industry. Around 1500 vocational training centres are proposed in PPP mode in unserved blocks of the country. We are encouraging flexi-MoUs with Industries to promote employability. Premier academic institutions are being roped in for sustained improvement in vocational training. We are using distance education technology for capacity building of our technical teachers. MSMEs are not only important for job creation, promoting entrepreneurship but are also important for providing on the job training to youth. We are providing for financial assistance to promote apprenticeship in MSME. We are also suitably revising our legislation so as to encourage industry participation for quality apprenticeship,” he elaborated.

93% of India workforce is in unorganised Sector. A large portion of it is self-employed. Social protection to these groups is our priority. We are revamping our flagship scheme RSBY. Presently 38.5 million families have so far been benefitted by this cashless health insurance. We are trying to improve the quality of service through advanced IT infrastructure. Besides increasing the coverage of the scheme it is also proposed to seed the bank account details and unique citizen ID into the RSBY smart card. Flexibility is provided to provinces to ride their social security scheme on RSBY platform. In another important initiative we have also started a pilot project for convergence of 3 important social security schemes, life insurance, old age pension and health insurance at a single point of contact for unorganised workers through RSBY smart card.

Promoting financial inclusion is the priority of our government. The Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi inaugurated the scheme for universal access to banking facilities called “Jan Dhan Yojna” in the last week of August. 15 million bank accounts were opened on the first day of the scheme. The schemes targets to open 75 million bank accounts by the end of January 2015. In the organised sector, we are now going to provide portability of provident fund through Universal Account Number. The initiative will benefit each of the more than 40 million subscribers. Now a minimum pension is also guaranteed.

We are amending our labour laws in order to encourage investment, ease of doing business and entrepreneurship. Amendments have also been proposed to enhance safety at workplace and working conditions especially for women. Use of Personal Protective Equipment has been made mandatory for hazardous industries. Amendment in legislation has also been proposed to allow night work for women. This would promote participation of women in labour force. We are also working on Minimum age of employment, and to provide a mandatory national floor level of minimum wages. We are also in process to draft a single law for MSME to increase formalisation.

We have developed a unified web portal for online compliance of labour laws thereby promoting ease of compliance. Employers henceforth will be able to file a single, simplified, annual online return instead of filing separate returns under multiple laws. Labour Inspection Scheme is also being revamped to make it completely objective, transparent and accountable.

India has a healthy tradition of tripartism. We are committed to achieve targets of progress and growth with cooperation of all stake holders with cooperation of all stake holders. I am confident that this mutual discussion in the G20 forum would be a positive initiative for ensuring growth and employment in the world.”

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