

A new education law in the offing

A good initiative but address the lacunae

A draft education law, conforming to the recommendation of the National Education Policy-2010, has been put up for public comments. We feel the law is timely and contains several important provisions, and the government should be lauded for it. The subjects fixed for the various classes are very relevant and so is the bringing of English medium schools under a strict regime. The law has reinforced the provision of the constitution which makes primary education a right of the children and has reclassified the stages of education into four.

The laudatory measures notwithstanding, there are serious lacunae therein that require rethinking like the method of fixing fees for the English medium schools and the provisions on private tuition and coaching centres. Certain areas need elaboration too, like the qualifying age for the pre-primary level. The government has to address several very distinct dimensions of the proposed law, namely, ensuring cent percent enrolment in free pre-primary, funding and equitable distribution of funds. Also there are several loopholes that lend the law to misuse and need to be plugged. An oversight mechanism shall have to be put in place to enforce the provisions.

Although laws ought to be backed by adequate punitive provisions it seems that this law, that deals with an innocuous subject as education, has a surfeit of penal provisions.

Funding the scheme will pose a challenge given that shortage of funds has impeded, among other things, infrastructure development of schools and colleges. There are a large number of dilapidated schools waiting for repair. Children risk their lives to attend classes in buildings that have been declared dangerous but no repair work has taken place despite those being declared dangerous for several years. We feel that inbuilt in the law should be provision for attending to these matters in the shortest possible time.

Last but not the least is the sensitive issue of private teaching and coaching centres. Not all students have uniform capability to learn neither do all teachers have identical teaching capacity. While we do not want coaching to be imposed, which is done by some teachers currently, we feel some students do have need for special and extra attention, and should not be denied coaching. It is a good initiative, but requires some vital changes to be more effectual.