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NEP FINAL DRAFT

Extension of the RTE Act way too costly, proposal set to be shredded

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SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @ New Delhi

A crucial provision to extend the Right to Education Act, 2009 to provide free and compulsory education for all children and adolescents between the ages 3-18 is set to be dropped from the National Education Policy (NEP) draft that is being finalised for the Union Cabinet's approval.

The Act at present covers children aged 6-14. The first draft of the new policy had a downward and upward extension of the Act. However, the Union Human Resources Ministry has decided to drop it from the NEP, claiming it will have huge financial implications for the government.

In its internal discussions, sources told this newspaper, the HRD ministry calculated that its budget on Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, under which RTE is covered, will nearly triple if the Act is extended. As of now, the government spends nearly ₹35,000 crore every year on the scheme.

"Our goal is to facilitate education to all children in the country but making a provision (for the extension) in the Act itself will bring a financial burden for which the government is not ready yet," a senior official said. A final decision on the NEP is likely on Friday before it is sent to the Prime Minister's Office.

The original version of the draft policy had called the RTE Act an "important milestone in the history of Indian Education", adding the Act must be extended to include early childhood education through secondary school education.

A later version of the NEP said it would consider RTE's extension. The proposal is now set to be chucked.

Experts expressed disappointment. "If the government cannot commit to long-term investment in education citing financial reasons then nothing can be more disappointing than that," said educationist Neelam Sood who has previously been with the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration.

BIG DISAPPOINTMENT, SAYS EDUCATIONIST

"It's a well established fact through multiple researches that learning till age 6 sets the foundation for life. The government cannot ignore it," said disappointed educationist Neelam Sood