PRESS RELEASE

Right to Education Forum organized a press conference on draft National Education Policy 2019 on the 30th of July at Press Club of India in presence of nearly 100 participants. The speakers at the press conference were Prof. Muchkund Dubey, Former Secretary and President, Council for Social Development; Shatrughan Prasad Singh, Ex MP, General Secretary Bihar Madhyamik Shikshak Sangh and All India Secondary Teachers’ Federation, Rampal Singh, President All India Primary Teachers’ Federation, Sumitra Mahajan, Alliance for Right to ECD and Ambarish Rai, National Convener RTE Forum. During the press conference, the speakers welcomed the positive recommendations in the policy like expansion of RTE Act to provide free and compulsory education to all children from 3-18 years (presently the act covers children from only 6-14 years). Concerns were raised on the attempts at dilution of norms and standards of the RTE Act which the speakers feared will lead to increasing inequality in the education system.

Ambarish Rai in his speech highlighted the poor implementation of the RTE Act 2009 despite nearly 10 years of its enforcement. He also emphasised that decreasing public investment in education should immediately be reversed and at least 6% of GDP should be allocated for education. Referring to the draft National Education Policy he said “while we welcome inclusion of 3-18 years in the RTE Act as it has been our long-standing demand, however our question to the government is what will be the financial allocation to ensure school education is universalised in the country”. He raised concern on the increasing privatisation of education and emphasised that there should be sufficient public spending on education instead of relying on CSR funds and philanthropic institutions. He further mentioned that any attempts at centralising education by ignoring the diversity of the country should be vehemently opposed”.

Prof Muchkund Dubey, “The RTE Act 2009 is highest stage reached in the evolution of education policy in India. Elementary education is now a fundamental right and a legislation has been enacted by the Indian Parliament to give effect to it. The RTE Act confers a legal right, a policy document does not confer such rights and hence a policy document cannot surpass the RTE Act”. He further raised questions on the school complexes suggested in the policy and also condemned the reliance on volunteers through programmes like RIAP and NTP which he said will lead to informalisation of education. Instead there should be reliance on trained qualified teachers as enshrined in the RTE Act 2009.

Shatrughan Prasad Singh, Ex MP, General Secretary Bihar Madhyamik Shikshak Sangh and All India Secondary Teachers’ Federation mentioned that the government should ensure equitable and qualitative education for all children and he mentioned that loosening of RTE Act norms will further widen the gaps between the haves and have nots. He welcomed the recommendations in the document that teachers will not be engaged in non-teaching work. He said that a National Pay Commission should be established for scientific and transparent standard for fixing the salary and the promotion of teachers. He further emphasised that the creation of the Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog that will be headed by the Prime Minister will lead to centralisation of education.
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Rampal Singh, President- All India Primary Teachers’ Association welcomed the recommendation in the policy of bringing back the no detention policy in the RTE Act. He mentioned that nearly 11 lakh teachers posts are lying vacant in the country and there is an urgent need to fill up these vacancies. He also said that there is no mention of the Common School System in the entire policy document which is a very glaring omission.

Sumitra Mishra from Alliance from Right to Early Childhood Development mentioned that the policy document talks about learning crisis but fails to realise that this is because of systemic failure and not the failure of children. To ensure equitable quality education, inputs are vital and no census exam in class 3 and 5 will solve it. She further highlighted the need for professional teachers who will take care of early childhood education.