



SCHOOL EDUCATION IN WEST BENGAL

MEMORANDUM OF THE
MINISTER (SCHOOL EDUCATION), WEST BENGAL
IN THE EDUCATION MINISTERS' CONFERENCE
HELD IN NEW DELHI ON 24 MAY 1984

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Memorandum of the Govt. of West Bengal in the Meeting of Education Ministers held in New Delhi on 23-24th May, 1984

Introduction

On this happy occasion of assembly of Honourable Education Ministers of different States/Union Territories of India, I would like to submit a short report of different aspects of activities, objectives and statements of the Education Department of the Government of West Bengal. My esteemed colleague Prof. Sambhu Ghosh, Minister of Higher Education of my State will also submit similar report mainly concerning higher education.

At this august gathering I would again like to draw the attention of my honourable friends and colleagues to the universally accepted truth that education has not only its invaluable impact on social life but also a wide bearing on the degree of productivity in agriculture, industry and other fields. The recent study of the World Bank has once again authenticated this gospel. As our country is encumbered with about half of the total illiterate people of this planet and as the standard of living of our people stands at 196th place in the World (according to the Survey Report entitled "the World in Figures"), our deliberations and decisions are bound to have a far-reaching consequence in our national, social and economic life. Honourable friends, let us contribute our resourceful experiences and ideas so that we may reach to a consensus which is badly needed at this critical juncture. Let us not forget that for a country like ours having so much diversities and imbalances there is scope for divisive and colonial forces to attempt to disintegrate the unity of India. Who can deny that all of us are committed to our people to uphold the banner of national unity at any cost and to strive towards optimum utilisation and fullest development of our huge human resources.

Education in the Constitution of India

This State Government believes that Education should be in the State List as it was originally. We have been trying to initiate a national debate over the 1976 amendment of the Constitution of India by which Education was brought under the Concurrent List. We had, in the past, very clearly laid down the rationale behind our claim for placement of Education under the State List. We also had attempted to have this matter discussed in depth both at academic levels and at

policy-making levels including such forums as the CAGE and the Education Ministers' meetings. We have, it appears, been prevented from having a full discussion on this point in the past. It is the earnest desire of my State Government to have the matter placed before this forum for a detailed discussion on the pros and cons of inclusion of education in the Concurrent List.

We have also stated in the past that development of education in our State has suffered from its being placed under the Concurrent List. We have currently no less than 5 Bills to which Presidential assent has been withheld; and the Bills to which Presidential assent has not yet been received include one of paramount importance from the point of view of Primary Education in the State—The West Bengal Primary Education (Amendment) Bill, 1983. Without this, the State is not in a position to constitute the proposed District Primary School Councils and to set up the State Board for Primary Education, which would have given the necessary fillip to universalisation of Primary Education.

Education and budgeting

We have also brought to the notice of the Union Government in the past that, despite education being brought under the Concurrent List, there has not been any proportionate increase in the allocations of the Union Government for its development.

The State Government has stepped up its outlay on education from a level of Rs. 127 crores in 1976-77 to about Rs. 468 crores (including educational investment of other departments) in the year 1984-85. The 1984-85 budgetary outlay of the State Government constitute deployment of about 26% of the resources of the State whereas the Union Government has, for the year 1984-85, proposed to spend marginally less than 1% of its allocable resources (including the investment for Department of Culture). The per capita expenditure of the State Government on education will exceed Rs. 85 in the year 1984-85 whereas the corresponding figure for the Union Government for the year 1984-85 will be marginally above Rs. 5. In addition to it a sum of Rs. 2.39 crores and Rs. 5.76 crores have been provided in the State Budget for Sports Branch and Youth Welfare Branch of Education Department respectively bringing budgeted expenditure on Education to over Rs. 476 crores.

The State Government had also placed before the 8th Finance Commission a demand for financial assistance to the tune of Rs. 260.2 crores for school education sector. The demand was placed before the Finance Commission with the recommendation of the Union Education Ministry after their detailed examination. The State Government, however, is still in the dark regarding any decision on this issue. There appears to be still some confusion whether such requirement should fit in to the frame-work of Finance Commission or Planning Commission. All that our State Government feels is that a social necessity is supposed to be met

the procedure that we have created is supposed to serve the Society and very definitely not the other way round. We would urge upon the Union Government with all the emphasis at our command that the fund has to be provided for—within the formalities, if possible. Society can hardly wait for forms.

Proposal before the Union Government

The Union Government lays great emphasis on universalisation of elementary education. This implies not only universal enrolment but also universal retention of students and therefore implies large-scale adoption of strategies directed towards minimising stagnation and wastage. The State Government operates several incentive programmes designed to improve access to the educational system of the disadvantaged Sections—Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Women and the rural poor. However, due to severe budgetary constraints, the State Government cannot operate the incentive schemes on the scale that it would like to. It is the feeling of the State Government that, if the Union Government should also extend central assistance to the State so that the incentive programmes can be operated throughout the State in all educationally backward areas in order to have the maximum impact. Without this, it is the feeling of my State Government that universalisation of elementary education will remain nothing but a slogan.

We shall be looking forward to a scheme of Central Assistance where the resources required for new schools at least for the weaker segments of the populations like girls, S.C./S.T. students will be available to the States. We urge upon the Union Government to give serious thought in this regard while formulating the Seventh Plan.

The State Government has also felt that the Union Government limits its central assistance to several conventional central and centrally sponsored schemes only. This does not allow the State Government to adapt the schemes to local needs. This State Government ardently desire the Central Schemes will be made more flexible.

Review of achievements under universalisation of elementary education

The State Government has, during the year 1983-84 set up 1200 Primary Schools and 250 Junior High Schools. At the end of 1983-84, the State has about 50,000 Primary Schools with an enrolment of 73.75 lakhs and more than 5,000 Junior High Schools and 5,190 High Schools. The enrolment in classes VI to VIII is 23.85 lakhs. 4,050 new teaching posts in the Primary Schools and 8,000 in the Secondary Sector have been created in 1983-84 from the State budget. More than Rs. 2.63 crores have been invested in repair/reconstruction of school buildings. The additional enrolment targets for the year 1984-85 have been set at 3,30,000 for the age group 6 to 11 and 2,50,000 for the age group 11 to 14 in consultation with the Planning Commission. This will bring the gross enrolment ratio for the age group 6 to 11 to about 95% and that for the age group 11-14 to 58.5% by

1984-85. The progress of the State towards the universalisation of elementary education over the last five years is detailed below:

	<i>Enrolment (in lakhs)</i>						
	1976-77	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
Age 6 to 11	59.00	63.49	65.95	67.99	70.13	73.75	77.05
Age 11 to 14	14.11	16.84	18.43	19.10	21.50	23.85	26.35

Apparently some discrepancies have crept in the figures supplied in the agenda notes at annexure—II. We would like to correct the figures as follows:

	<i>(Figures in lakhs)</i>					
	Primary			Middle		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
6th Plan target	45.69	36.00	81.69	18.70	12.47	31.17
1980-81	39.75	26.20	65.95	11.06	7.37	18.43
1981-82	40.66	27.33	67.99	11.60	7.50	19.10
1982-83	41.23	28.90	70.13	12.90	8.60	21.50
1983-84	42.94	30.81	73.75	14.00	9.85	23.85

We have already reported that our present achievement is 92.48% coverage in Primary area and 56.10% in the Middle area. While we are fairly assured that 100% coverage in the Primary area will be achieved by 1990, we have already reported to the Planning Commission as well as the Education Ministry that it may not be feasible to achieve 100% coverage in the Middle level unless the Union Government steps in to augment the States Budget for larger investment in this area.

Review of achievements under non-formal education

The State Government has, during the year 1983-84, set up 1,600 non-formal education centres, including 600 centres exclusively for girls. By the end of 1983-84, the State Government has 16,660 operational non-formal education centres with 416,000 students. The State Government has a target for setting up another 1,000 non-formal education centres for the year 1984-85 on a 50 : 50 cost-sharing basis with the Union Government. The State Government is, as yet, unawared whether the central scheme for setting up NFE centres exclusively for girls on 90 : 10 cost

sharing basis with the Union will continue in the year 1984-85. We would be only too happy to participate in such a programme during the year 1984-85 and also during the 7th Plan period to make good the existing shortfall in women achieving functional literacy by reaching Class-VIII standards. The State Government has also undertaken preparation of suitable instructional materials for NFE centres for use during 1984-85.

Some mistakes appear to have crept in the figures supplied in the agenda notes at annexure-I(ii) (8). The running centres for non-formal education during 1983-84 was 16,660 with a student population of 4,16,000. Moreover, it has not been noted that, in accordance with the National guidelines the entire non-formal education structure in West Bengal has now been unified and therefore there is no question of categorising the centres between the Primary and middle levels.

Supply of concessional paper

There is no doubt that this has been quite helpful for expansion of elementary education. But we are constrained to point out this time lag between placement of orders and supply by mills is so great that our projects remain stalled. Again the time allowed between receipt of allocation and placement of order is so small that it becomes extremely difficult to process the cases and place orders in time. The danger of this process lies in the fact that a good amount of public money is left with the private producers for such a long time that there is a possibility of additional financial gain to the private sector at the cost of the public.

Review of progress under special assistance programmes

A. NFE centres exclusively for girls: As already stated, the State Government has fully utilised its quota of 600 such centres for the year 1983-84 and would be happy to participate in similar programmes in the years to come.

B. Appointment of Women teachers: The State Government had requested the Union Government to provide central assistance for appointment of Women Teachers of Primary Schools to the tune of at least 800 in 1983-84 and an additional 1,000 for 1984-85. The Union Government had sanctioned 200 posts only for the year 1983-84. The quota has been utilised. The State Government would like to request that at least 1,000 posts of women teachers be provided during the year 1984-85. We would like to clarify in this connection that the State Government has already drawn up a programme to create 5,300 additional posts of Primary School teachers for the year 1984-85 out of State resources.

C. Implementation of award scheme: The State Government has availed itself of the Award Scheme for the year 1984-85 and a total sum of Rs. 10 lakhs was sanctioned by the Government of India as Award at the levels of Gram Panchayats, blocks and districts. Necessary steps have already been taken to utilise the funds provided in keeping with the guidelines of the Union Government.

The State Government would desire a continuance of the programme during the year 1984-85 and the 7th Plan period and also stepping up of the award money as this will surely a fillip towards expansion of girls' education and will lead to healthy competition between districts and also between smaller units. So, the grants under this scheme should be substantially increased.

D. Incentive Schemes: The State Government realises that, along with universal enrolment, it is equally important to ensure universal retention of students. The agenda notes indicate that, for the country as a whole, the drop-out rates were 59.8% and 79.6% respectively for primary and middle schools in 1979-80. The corresponding figures for our State would be around 45% and 65%. We have introduced several important steps, including provision of incentives, in order to encourage greater retention of students in the primary classes. All students in the primary classes are provided with free text books, for which the State Government had incurred an expenditure of more than Rs. 4.00 crores during 1983-84. Our endeavour is to provide school dresses to all Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe girl students and 40% general girl students in rural areas; an expenditure of Rs. 1.26 crores was incurred for this purpose during 1983-84. Our mid-day meal programme covers more than 28 lakh students while another 6.90 lakh students are covered under the CARE assistance programme.

In tune with the recommendations made at the national level earlier, we have introduced the policy of no-detention in the primary classes, three years ago.

Our Government strongly feels that, if the various incentive programmes are to yield the desired result, Government of India should step in with much larger financial assistance in these programmes to augment the meagre resources of the States.

Implementation of 10+2 pattern of education

The State of West Bengal has been one of the pioneers in introduction of 10+2 pattern of education which has been universally introduced throughout the State.

A neglected area

The State Government wants to call the attention of the national policy framers to a severely neglected area in education. The educational process for the physically handicapped children and the traditional systems in tols and madrashas are totally left to the State Governments to fend for. Our State Government has taken measures within their limited capacity to expand and modernise these systems but we would definitely welcome a national effort to this direction. The scale of pay of teachers of madrashas of all types have been brought at par with the teachers of Secondary Schools and full financial liability of all madrashas have been taken by the State Government.

Examination reforms

We are a little surprised that in the agenda notes achievement of West Bengal has not been incorporated under this item. We have repeatedly informed the Union Government that the examination system now we have adopted both at the Class X and +2 level is working quite satisfactorily and we can take a modest pride in the fact that in West Bengal examinations are held peacefully and results are published in time. There has not been any complaint worth mentioning regarding the fairness of our examination system during the last seven years.

Vocationalisation of education

The State Government is in agreement with the Union Government that a realistic adoption of the vocational education structure is essential to lead to a meaningful and healthy educational system with linkages towards employment areas. The State Government has, with the help of the State Planning Board, already undertaken a detailed study of restructuring of the vocational education programme. However, we would like to draw the attention of the Union Govt. to the following issues which appear to be pending with the Union for a decision:

- (a) A proposal to amend the Apprenticeship Act, to cover the students under the vocational stream;
- (b) A proposal to set up an All-India Board for vocational education to give necessary advice and assistance to the State Government in implementing vocational courses; and
- (c) A proposal to have the NCERT draw up model projects for development of certain skills through the vocational programme based on a market survey of employment potentials and survey of skills in demand by the organised sector.

Introduction of computer education in schools

The State Government has already taken steps to select schools for introduction of Computer Education as a co-curricular activity in keeping with the guidelines of the Union Government.

Utilisation of INSAT for education

West Bengal is not as yet one of the INSAT States. But we were offered assistance by the Union Government for setting up of a studio for preparation of a audio-visual materials to be telecast. The State Government has already agreed that the entire responsibility will be taken over after five years. We have already moved the Union Government for necessary funds in the current financial year.

Introduction of productivity education at school level

The State Government has already introduced work education (SUPW) as a compulsory subject both at elementary and at secondary levels. We consider

productivity education as a pervading theme in the entire curriculum and therefore work education as a special subject is only a symbol which is also present in other discipline.

Language teaching in schools and implementation of the Three Language Formula

The State Government has already implemented the Three Language Formula; and only the mother tongue is being taught in the primary school level. English has been made a compulsory subject from class VI standard to class XII standard. Since English is being introduced at the level of class VI, the State Government and the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education are aware of the need to initiate changes in the methods of English teaching. Towards this end, new English text-books for class VI onwards have been designed and a teachers' manual has been prepared by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education. The Board has also trained 200 teachers as resource personnel and, with their help, has already oriented teachers from about 70% of the Secondary Schools in the State.

Apart from the efforts to introduce the State policy of primary education through mother tongue and thereby compressing English language education between Classes VI and XII, the State Government is also implementing the CIEFL scheme. The State already has two institutions of standing. We are also preparing a scheme for taking advantage of district centres within the frame-work of the Union Government scheme and our key personnel have been trained by the CIEFL Hyderabad. We would be able to draw up our scheme shortly.

The annual out-turn of the existing institutes of English is 160. The courses are designed in consultations with the British Council.

Review of text-books from the point of view of National Integration

Traditionally and historically, the environment of this State is quite congenial to the maintenance of harmonious relation amongst different religious, linguistic and racial segments of people living in this State. The State Government, educational organisations and institutions without being steeped in self-complacency in this regard are always serious to observe the process in preparing and reviewing text-books, curricula and educative materials. The West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education, the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education, the State Council of Educational Research and Training have already taken appropriate steps towards this end. The helping hand extended to them by the NCERT is appreciated by the State Government. The matter would be taken up in right earnest as soon as a litigation on some related issues now pending before the Court of law is finalised.

Additional facilities for Scheduled Castes/Tribes

The Scholarship scheme for SC/ST students are meant for all schools and the State Government has not put any bar to genuine candidates in any school.

Regarding extending such assistance to the students of the Kendriya Vidyalayas we would like to point out that the State Government officials will have to be given access to the accounts of the schools before we can take some decision.

There is also a reservation of 5% for ST students and 15% for SC students for admission to educational institution of the State including higher technical institutions.

~~We are surprised that the preparatory courses for SC/ST students existing in West Bengal have not been mentioned in the agenda notes.~~

Strengthening of monitoring and evaluation system

The system is already in operation in the State which, however, covers the entire educational area. From the current financial year, the State Government has taken a decision to start an exclusive monitoring system for school education area and some provisions have been made in the current year's plan budget in consultation with the Planning Commission. The State Government would like to have an assurance of the Union Government that, by strengthening this system during the last year of the 6th Plan, the State Government will be entitled to plan resources in the 7th Plan. The State Government would also request the Union Government to consider if some central assistance scheme can be drawn up in this area during the 7th Plan period which, apart from providing funds, will also be able to help the State with technical know-how.

Quarterly report: We have been taken aback to see that in the Annexure-I at page XI(5) of the agenda notes it has been enacted that no quarterly report had been received from West Bengal since September, 1983. According to our records it appears that we have sent such reports in October, 1983 and some correspondence had also been made between the Union and the State Governments in this regard. Our latest figures are under compilation and will be reaching the Union Government shortly.

Library services and neoliterates

The State Government views the library movement not merely as a means of cultural pursuits and of recreation but functionally as a protective measure for retention of literacy amongst the neoliterates. The State Government has enacted the Public Libraries Act, 1979 which envisages a State Library Council with the Minister-in-Charge as Chairman to advise the State Government on matters relating to development of libraries.

Already, in our State 17 district libraries, 118 sub-divisional libraries and 2,276 rural libraries have been established with a total outlay of Rs. 3.8 crores as on 1983-84. In these libraries, only 20% of books are purchased from the list of books prepared by the State Library Council, and the libraries are free to purchase the remaining 80% according to their own choice. The entire expenditure is borne on the State budget.

Conclusion

Before I conclude I would like to submit that in view of the special features of our country, the common aim in the field of education cannot be achieved without joint venture based on mutual trust and respect and without sincerely pursuing the policy of non-interference in the sphere of the respective Governments.

I sincerely hope that the deliberation of this conference would have important and far-reaching bearing on educational policy, planning and administration in our country.

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