

Joint Statement on the NEP implementation

JointForum for Movement on Education (JFME)

Say NO to the implementation of NEP!

Say NO to privatization and commercialization of Education!

The JFME demands that the National Education Policy-2020 not be implemented as it will pave the way for further privatization and commercialization of education without any accountability to society and signals the withdrawal of the Government from its responsibility to provide accessible and quality education for all citizens. The fact that the document has been passed by Cabinet without a discussion in Parliament shows how pernicious conditions are being introduced to dismantle public-funded education in the country. The JFME further demands that the NEP 2020 be subjected to wider scrutiny and debate and not be implemented and thrust upon State Legislatures in this insidious manner.

Education is the key to social progress and economic transformation. Since the announcement of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP), many sections of civil society, educationists, democratic organizations and individuals have been expressing their apprehension about the proposed policy changes and its effect on the national education system on several counts. There has been a widespread understanding that the Union Government should not renege on the requirement of adhering to a balance of power between Centre and States provided by the Indian Constitution. It is unfortunate that the Government has been proceeding with the implementation of many provisions of the NEP in a big way without consulting the state legislatures or considering the concerns expressed by many educationists. The NEP is being imposed on the state administrations through the administrative orders of Ministry of Education.

Although some States have submitted their objections in writing, but the state administrations are succumbing to the pressure of the Union Government. In spite of the fact that the state governments as well as the state legislatures are on record to have asked the Centre to reconsider the NEP, the strategy adopted for the implementation of NEP in these states is to rush the changes in the national system of education through administrative orders. While there are exceptions like the Government of Jharkhand is even re-opening previously closed schools, full efforts are being made by the Centre even in these States to push NEP through MHRD, UGC and other such Central agencies, especially through select bureaucrats in States.

In Tamil Nadu (TN), where the opposition to NEP was a major issue in the recently concluded state elections, the outgoing government had got the aided-Colleges/Universities to start 4-year Voc Ed courses with year-wise Certificates/Diplomas and very high fees. In Kerala, huge and subversive push is being given through bureaucracy, focusing for now on School Education with "Samagra Shiksha" as main vehicle. All States have been told to form Committees (mostly of bureaucrats) which would work directly with MHRD, often confidentially through selected IAS/Joint Secretary-level officers.

Each State has been told to appoint a Nodal Officer who is given often confidential instructions by MHRD. Spreadsheets with tasks, responsibilities have been issued to the bureaucrats. A lot of work is being done through a series of UGC circulars.

The BJP-ruled States are going full-steam ahead although at different speeds and in different ways with common features being (apart from above): Closure of schools, getting started with 4-year Vocational Education courses in Colleges & Universities with huge fee hikes, Privatization in different forms. In Haryana, even Government "Sanskriti Schools" are charging huge fees in the name of 'model schools'. Karnataka seems to be a front-runner. The government is ready with a 10-year roadmap with administrative and legislative measures. The Government has proposed to go ahead with the formation of State Education Commission and the enactment of State University legislation.

The Government is going ahead with the implementation task force (headed by Education Secretary) with quarterly review. The Government is looking into institutionalizing the “school complex” idea. The Government is going ahead with school closures even though 40% rural students don’t have access. There are changes in pre-primary education (3.5 yrs in schools) with Anganwadis being given the role of implementation.

The MP government is also going ahead and the State-level Committee has been formed for the purpose by the State Administration. Questionnaires are being sent to College Teachers, School Principals in Madhya Pradesh asking them how to implement NEP, thus making them “participants” directly linked with MHRD. The Government has formed Subject level Teams for School Education in Science, Mathematics and Language with experts from Maharashtra, Delhi, and also from abroad. Tripura is vigorously implementing, even before NEP declaration. Many schools (961) closed and 840 handed over to private bodies. Colleges are being handed over or put in public private partnerships (PPP) mode. Private Vocational Colleges are being affiliated with Tripura (Central) University. Many College/Universities have started Vocational Education Courses started with huge fee hike. “One India, one syllabus” is being implemented in schools. 4-yr Vocational Education Courses with Rs.4-5 lakh fees in colleges have been started in Tripura University even without AICTE accreditation in related courses. State University has started paid Master of Business Administration. 4-yr courses with Common admission to colleges have been proposed.

In Haryana, State Education Board has been weakened. The state government has started with Centralized admissions to Colleges/University through Department of Higher Education. There is a huge fee hike in Government Medical Colleges (Rs.25-50 lakhs). Fees have been raised even in it is. Reservation seats are being kept vacant with support from groups known for their public hostility to reservation policy. Pre-primary has been shifted to Anganwadis. Anganwadi workers (AWs) are being trained as per the change recommended in the NEP by the Union government. Concerted campaign for the implementation of NEP is underway among the college/university teachers. In Himachal Pradesh (HP), the State government is fully committed to the implementation of NEP at the state level. It has started Adult Education in Schools through student volunteers. In Andhra Pradesh (AP), in the implementation of NEP contradictory tendencies exist. The State Government is going ahead with the implementation of Compulsory English-medium primary onwards. Investment in government school infrastructure with 10 issues identified. Rs.15, 000/BPL student including uniform, bag, books etc is under implementation. Government school enrolment has increased.

There is as yet not enough awareness of the consequences of NEP for the system of education within the general population. Mass organizations are trying to reach all the stakeholders. Opposition to NEP is weak except among political leadership. Main opposition, wherever it exists, is from Left/progressive groups, so risk of being seen only as “political opposition”. At same time, active joint struggles have started against the steps being taken under the NEP in many states namely Haryana, Kerala and West Bengal. In West Bengal, active Students-Teachers Forum has been formed for strengthening the struggles around the Right to Education. In Kerala, Joint Platforms of Left/Progressive Teachers and Students organizations with KSSP as “Resource Person/Group” have started campaigning against the implementation of NEP. In Tripura, 13 left and progressive mass organizations have become active.

The JFME is concerned that in the implementation of the NEP the Centre is on the path to wipe out the Indian Constitutional values and mandates from the national system of education. In its latest policy move, the Centre has cleared the decks for Ramdev’s Patanjali Yogpeeth Trust, a private religious body, to establish the “Bhartiya Siksha Board” as a national school board for “Vedic Education”. The Bharatiya Shiksha Board is conceived to be the country’s first private national school board, which has been given the mandate to standardize “Indian traditional knowledge” and “blend it with modern education” by way of drafting curriculum, affiliating schools, conducting examinations and issuing certificates. This so-called blending of traditional knowledge, with modern education is a retrograde move, to take our society back into the dark ages with systems based on

belief rather than reason and evidence-based enquiry. Rather than fostering a scientific temper and independent thinking, it will promote uncritical acceptance and blind belief. Young minds will be molded accordingly, and the ground prepared for conservative and fanatical mindsets, unable to question status quo or to meet the challenges of a fast-changing modern world. The JFME constituents have been publicly communicating their strong opposition to this move of the Union government.

The JFME believes that the Centre's official sanction for a private school education board is a highly objectionable move. The objections received from the public have been ignored. It has been pointed out that it is not appropriate to standardize "Indian traditional knowledge". It obliterates the diversity that exists within the traditional texts of "Hindus" and presents the traditions in a homogenized manner which is unscientific. Further it opens the doors for similar requests from other unrecognized school boards. Take the announcement made by the Rajasthan government to go ahead with the setting up of a separate public board for "Vedic Education", namely "Vedic education and Sanskar" Board. It is also aiming to revive the knowledge of Sanskrit scriptures and Vedas. The Board will be formed in next five months.

The JFME is concerned that the Union government has disempowered the State governments and legislatures and reduced the state administration to rubber stamping the decisions taken by the Centre. The NEP has become a blueprint for privatization of all streams of education. There is widening of disparities in educational facilities and opportunities. There is a reduction in access to education for rural and urban poor, SC/ST and other disadvantaged sections. The NEP is responsible for the reduction in quality of education. It has weakened the policy of reservations. It has increased the costs of education across the board. It is unable to meet the aspirations of India's children and youth. It is creating parallel streams of non-formal school education. It has announced vocational skills from Class 6 onwards. The NEP does not consider education from 3 to 18 years as a Fundamental Right of India's children and youth.

The JFME notes with concern that the rate of student drop out from the schools is rising. The Centre and States are failing to prevent the students from the marginalized sections from dropping out of schools. According to the recently released "Unified District Information System for Education Plus" (UDISE+) report, more boys dropped out of school at the secondary level as well as in primary classes (1 to 5) in 2019-20. The number of girls dropping out of school in the upper primary classes (6-8) was even higher than that of the boys in 2019-20. The overall dropout rate at the secondary level in the country is over 17 per cent. The dropout rate for boys was higher in secondary classes (18.3 per cent) than girls (16.3 per cent).

The latest report is that over 12.5 lakh students of private schools in Haryana have not enrolled for the current academic session almost three months after it began. This prompted the Directorate of School Education in Haryana to send out a directive to district officials expressing "apprehensions" that they might have dropped out. The data submitted by private schools to the Haryana Education Department shows that 17.31 lakh students had enrolled for the 2021-22 academic session as of June 28, against 29.83 lakh last year.

With more than 15 lakh schools, nearly 97 lakh teachers and over 26.5 crore students from the pre-primary to the higher secondary level, the Indian school education system is one of the largest in the world. There are over 3.8 crore students enrolled at the secondary level, of whom 44.3 per cent are only enrolled in government schools. A little over 20 per cent are enrolled with government-aided private schools. Nearly 35 per cent are enrolled with private-unaided schools. The reports coming out on the school enrolment from the states should be a matter of great concern. It should make the Centre to have a fresh look at the NEP.

The JFME believes that the Centre and states need to implement the policy of "common schools" to prevent the students from dropping out of the schools. Evidence building suggests that rather than strengthening the Right to Education (RTE) act and moving towards the implementation of the policy

agenda of “common schools” the Centre and states are on the path to dilute the Right to Education (RTE) Act. After the amendments to Right to Education (RTE) in 2019-20, the Vijayapura district in Karnataka has witnessed a 90 percent reduction in RTE applications. The district authorities used to receive at least 10,000 applications every academic year since RTE was enforced. As the government amended the act, this year the Department of Primary and Secondary Education of Vijayapura has merely received 1,385 applications.

The JFME suggests that this is a consequence of the new rules requiring that students seeking admission under RTE in unaided schools should not have any government school within 3km of their residence. If the candidate applies for admission even after the presence of a neighborhood government school, then the application would be rejected immediately. It is a matter of grave concern that the authorities are mapping the locations of government, aided and private unaided schools of the area to deter the poor households from taking advantage of the RTE Act.

The JFME is concerned that the NEP is aggravating the problems of access to school education for the poor and resulting in an inconsistent quality of education. Several states in the country face challenges in school education due to reduced funding. The challenges include low learning levels among students; poor student strength in government schools; increased enrolment in inadequately-regulated English medium private schools; mushrooming of poor-quality private teacher training colleges; lack of integrated and quality school/student data, and a large number of legal cases. Teacher education is under-resourced. Serious government investment is lacking in the area in government universities. 90 per cent of teaching institutes in the country are substandard private institutions. The government is not willing to support the teacher education department in Central universities with better academic resources so that we can bring out qualified teachers.

The JFME believes that the Credit Framework for Online Learning Courses through Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM) Regulations 2021 and the proposed Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) model and Blended mode of Learning (BL) model, if implemented, will redefine the entire paradigm of Higher Education. These intend to reduce the role of teachers and universities by reducing association between students with them. The UGC Concept Note on BL turns students into customers and uses fancy clauses like "pick teachers and timings", "frame your courses", "design your degree", "student centric" and so on and so forth. However, such dubious and meaningless clauses mask the ulterior reality of the move towards dismantling public education in the country. In reality, these aim at reducing expenditure towards public funded higher education in the garb of "students' choice".

The JFME believes that the proposed ABC model will facilitate the credit recognition and credit redemption process for students who may choose all the 100% courses as per their choice. Evidence suggests that the four years undergraduate (UG) degree course of “Bachelor of Liberal Education” in place of prevailing specialized Honors Degree will turn out to be a retrograde step. It will damage our capacity for knowledge production. Throughout the world specialization rules the roost in the form of subject selected as major or minor. Specialization and collaborative work are required for path breaking research and our abilities to comprehend crisis like the pandemic which we face today.

The latest proposal of the Union Government on "blended learning" suggests that forty (40) % of the course offered can be in virtual mode. It reinforces our apprehension that the plan is to dispense with a large number of teachers. The NEP was silent on the role of teachers and student unions in the governance of India’s educational system. The Modi government is bent on curtailing the democratic rights of students, teachers and parents. Democratic rights include the right of have elected unions for collective raising of issues, can be practiced only in a structure where service and working conditions, including security of service, are regulated by an independent body outside of the local management, so that any violations thereof can be challenged.

The NEP envisages that the federal and affiliating system shall end, each HEI will function as an autonomous unit with its management, called the Board of Governors (BoG) having the freedom and

power to make all regulations concerning service and working conditions, apart from all academic decisions such as number of students and teachers, qualifications prescribed, courses offered, fees charged, salary fixed etc. (these were hitherto regulated by the UGC), which shall not be open to scrutiny by any other body. Less than a third of the BoG will comprise members from within the HEI, who shall not be chosen by any democratic process such as election or even rotation on the basis of seniority. They will therefore be handpicked by the other two-thirds, who will comprise representatives of the relevant Government, representatives of the primary funders, and "public-minded individuals" (who will presumably be hand-picked by the relevant Government agency such as the Shiksha Ayog). With the removal of all democratic representation in the management, coupled with the hire and fire power of the BoG, teachers are not expected to have the confidence to exercise their academic freedom, leave alone form associations and participate in other democratic activities. With the fragmentation of Universities into autonomous units, each with its own set of rules, the existing teachers' and employees' associations would become toothless and unable to protect the service conditions of their erstwhile members. Added to this, institutions will face a tremendous financial burden when, through the NEP-2020, the government shirks its responsibility of funding institutions and says that "...any public institution can take initiatives towards raising private philanthropic funds to enhance educational experiences." This will undoubtedly promote private take-over of our HEI's.

The specific mention of conditions for award of tenure-track, a minimum of five-year probation, quantum of "compensation"(presumably on termination of services), "merit" rather than seniority being the criteria for promotions and emoluments, will only encourage sycophancy, rather than independent thinking and expression and the forging of collective solidarities. Needless to say, this will also strike a body-blow to the quality of teaching and research. Nor will it foster an atmosphere of free debate and discussion in the institution, which is a prerequisite for any meaningful education. The top down, corporate style, all-powerful management dominated by non-academic elements aligned to ruling parties and corporate interests will lead to unbridled commercialization, exclusion of marginalized sections and steep decline in quality. Without the protective umbrella of UGC/ University Regulations, the danger of non-academic elements interfering in course content, admissions, fees, selections, service conditions etc is obvious. Already there is, on one hand, a concerted attempt to smuggle in pseudo-science, and on the other to distort and re-write history, both of which have been widely criticized by eminent scholars and faculty across the country.

With the NEP enabling the take-over of all public universities by such elements, the stated goals of public education, namely to promote Constitutional values of equality, fraternity, social justice, liberty, scientific temper and humanism, are in danger of being completely abandoned.

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JOINT FORUM FOR MOVEMENT ON EDUCATION

All India Federation of University and College Teachers' Organizations, Federation of Central University Teachers' Associations, All India Federation of Retired University and College

Teachers' Organizations, All India University Employees Confederation, School Teachers' Federation of India, All India Secondary Teachers' Federation, All India Federation of Elementary Teachers' Organization, Indian Public Service Employees Federation, All India Primary Teachers' Federation. (AIPTF), All India Federation of Educational Association, All India Forum for Right to Education, All-India Save Education Committee, All India People's Science Network, Bharti Gyan Vigyan Samiti, Students' Organisations (AIDSO, AIMS, AIBSA, AGS, AIPSU, AISA, AISF, CYSS, DISHA, KYS, NEFIS, NSUI, SFI)

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