

18 months on, no sign of state's school edu policy

WORK IN PROGRESS A 12-member panel headed Punjabi University V-C gets another extension till March 31; was to submit blueprint to state govt in July 2018

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CHANDIGARH: The Capt Amarinder Singh-led Congress government is about to complete three years in power, but its new school education policy remains a work in progress.

The 12-member committee headed by Punjabi University vice-chancellor Professor BS Ghuman constituted by the state government in June 2018 is still to give the blueprint for the new school education policy. The committee comprising renowned academicians and education administrators was given a timeframe of one-and-a-half months by principal secretary, school education department, Krishan Kumar to formulate the policy, but the expert panel has already taken more than 18 months with three extensions.

The latest extension of two months was granted three days ago on the committee's request, allowing it time till March 31, 2020. Ghuman, who had initially given January-end 2019 as the likely timeframe for submitting the policy to the state government, did not respond to calls or text messages.

However, school education department sources said the committee had already held



* The panel was tasked with studying decreasing enrolment in government and aided schools, and interventions required for improving quality.

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consultations with the various stakeholders such as teachers, policymakers, education administrators, parents of schoolchildren, and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with focus on early childhood care and education (ECCE), vocational education, quality of teaching-learning and strategy for enrolling out-of-school children, particularly never enrolled ones. "The panel members are in the process of giving final touches to the policy. Once submitted, it will

require approval from the state cabinet," they said.

The committee members include National University of Educational Planning and Administration's (NUEPA) former professor Dr Marmar Mukhopadhyay, Panjab University professor Dr Kuldeep Puri, Central Square Foundation chairman Ashish Dhawan, Pratham director Dr Rukmani Banerjee, Centre for Civil Society senior manager, research, Diptasri Basu, Government Senior Secondary School lec-

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turer, Punjabi, Dr Davinder Bohra and retired teacher Sucha Singh Khattria, besides some officials of the school education department.

Punjab School Education Board (PSEB) chairman Manohar Kant Kalohia was also member of the committee, but he completed his tenure in November last year.

The panel was tasked with studying the decreasing enrolment in government and aided schools, interventions required for improving the quality of education and enabling inclusive education, existing infrastructure, participation of private/public corporate sector and NGOs, introduction of e-governance in school administration and the role of private schools along with the need to regulate them.

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BEHBAL KALAN FIRING

Were not pressured to give statement, say witnesses

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FARIDKOT: A couple of weeks after family of the key witness in 2015 Behbal Kalan firing case alleged that two Congress MLAs pressured him to give statement in favour of accused cops, eight other witnesses on Tuesday said no one ever asked them to depose in someone's favour.

Surjit Singh, the key witness in the case, died January 15 and his family blamed relatives of a village Congress leader of harassing them at the instance of two Congress MLAs. They alleged that the harassment allegedly led to his death.

During a press conference here on Tuesday, witnesses Hakam Singh Sekhon, Gurdit Singh, Angrej Singh, Balkaran Singh, Gurpreet Singh, Barma Singh, Ranjit Singh and Beant Singh said instead of fighting for justice, politicians are indulging in blame game over Behbal Kalan, Kotkapura and Bargari incidents.

"Surjit Singh was not the lone witness in the 2015 police firing case as claimed by Shiromani Akali Dal chief Sukhbir Singh Badal. There are 23 other witnesses. We have appeared before Supreme Court judge Justice Katju, Justice Jora Singh Commission, Justice Ranjit Singh Commission and the special investigation team as witnesses and recorded our statements. But Surjit never appeared before the SIT team as," they said.

"The claim that Surjit was pressured is politically moti-



* Witnesses during a press conference in Faridkot.

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SAY THE CLAIM THAT ONE OF THE WITNESSES WAS PRESSURED IS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED; PSPCL DIDN'T ONLY PENALISE HIM, BUT ALSO FIGHT OTHER HOUSES

ated. The Punjab State Power Corporation Limited didn't only imposed penalty of Surjit, as claimed by his family, but eight other houses of our village were also fined for violations," they added.

The witnesses said that this issue has been raised under a conspiracy to save the people responsible for sacrilege and firing incidents.

They appealed political parties to fight for justice to the Sikh community by punishing the real culprits.

FRESH COMPLAINT AGAINST MINISTER, CM'S ADVISER

Surjit's wife Jasvir Kaur named revenue minister Gurpreet Singh Kangar and CM political adviser Kushalce Dhillon in a fresh complaint filed at Bajakhana police station and demanded action against the and eight other, including the PSPCL employees and two cops for "mounting" pressure on husband.

She has also named the local Congress leader Manjinder Singh and two others, who have been booked on her previous complaint. Surjit's son Lakwinder said: "Police are trying to save people responsible for my father's death. The cops at PSPCL employees harassed us the best of Kangar and Dhillon. Mild sections have been imposed in the FIR against Manjinder," he added.