

Sunday

column



SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Every year around this time, newspapers are full of how private schools, out of sheer greed, are not implementing the Right To Education Act (RTE) in letter and spirit. Self-styled spokespersons of parent groups make all kinds of claims about how self-certified Economically Weaker Section (EWS) parents are being exploited by private schools. The time that the record was set right. Parliament passed the RTE, making it compulsory for all Unaided Private Schools to reserve 25% of seats, (initially at their primary and subsequently at all levels up to secondary) for children of "disadvantaged groups" to get them free education, including all expenses incurred by paying children. If parents, the UPS will be compensated by an amount that the administrators deem adequate, (per child recurring expenditure incurred by the state) which may be a fraction of the cost incurred by private schools! In highlighting this anomaly, we are only scratching the surface. Let us take the case of a school that has duti-

fully been admitting 25% disadvantaged children every year for the last eight years. Let us say it has a total intake of a 100 students including 25 from the "disadvantaged groups". Every year, the administration is obliged to announce the amount that it will disburse per child. Let us imagine for a moment that (sooner or later) this is done (often it's done after months or even years of delay). Let us imagine that the compensation, however paltry or inadequate, is finally paid (if not every year, then after a few years delay!) So, we take this hypothetical school, which by now

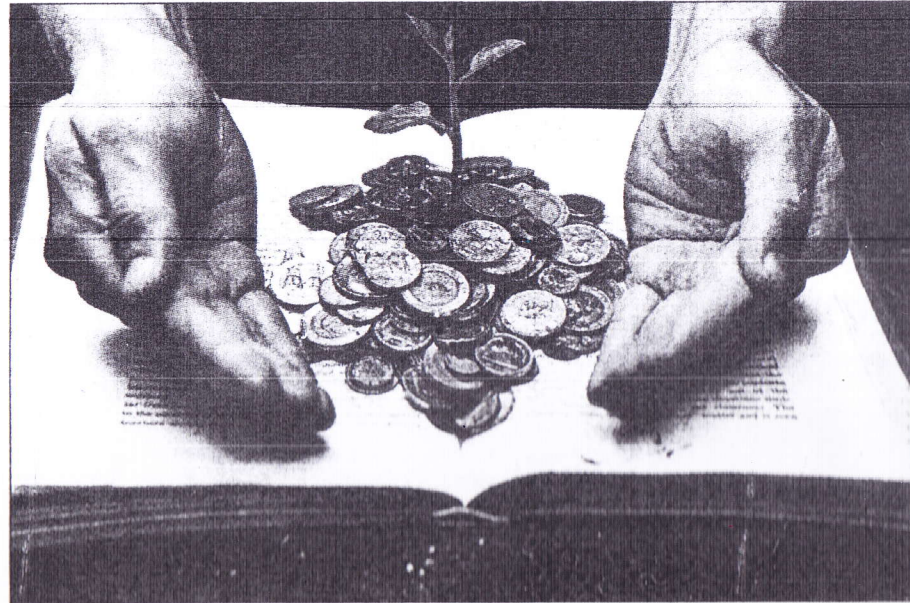
WHY MUST THE UNION AND STATE GOVERNMENT SEEK TO FRAME AND IMPLEMENT POLICIES THAT THEY DO NOT HAVE RESOURCES FOR? AND EVEN MORE IMPORTANTLY, CAN THE GOVERNMENTS NOT ALLOCATE MORE FUNDS FOR EDUCATION?

after eight years, should have been paid compensation for $25 + 25*2 + 25*3 + 25*4 + 25*5 + 25*6 + 25*7 + 25*8 = 900$ students till now. After three years, it will have added another 75 children (from Nursery to Class 8, ie 11 levels) after which it expects to get compensation for 275 students every year. But guess what actually happens?

QUESTION THAT NEEDS ANSWERING

By some perverse logic, the administration has actually owned up to paying for only the entry-level class, every year! In other words it has decided, as a matter of policy, to pay compensation for, at best, only 200 of 900 students stipulated by the RTE. Who is not implementing the RTE in letter and spirit? The administration or the UPS!

The Chandigarh administration is not alone in adopting this policy of only partial payment. Many other states have also used this kind of creative accounting to bully the UPS into accepting reservations for children of DGs. The favourite explanation that is trotted out –



Any scheme that reserves free or partly compensated seats for any section of the society, merely results in the paying students subsidising the non-paying students! GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

paucity of funds. As a result many high courts have issued orders restraining administrations from forcing private schools to implement the RTE, if they do not have sufficient funds. So the question that is begging to be asked is – why must the Union and the state governments seek to frame and implement policies that they do not have resources for? And even more importantly, can the governments not allocate more funds for education? Is the proper education of our children – the country's most important resource – not worth the expense? It may be kept in mind that all affiliated

unaided private schools are by definition not-for-profit organisations. Any scheme that reserves free or partly compensated seats for any section of society, merely results in the paying students subsidising the non-paying students! On top of this, there are severe restrictions on private schools on increasing fee! The next few years will see a drastic deterioration in the facilities provided by schools and even the closure of some.

(The author is director-principal, Saupin's Schools, Chandigarh/ Mohali & vice-president, Independent Schools' Association, Chandigarh. Views expressed are personal).