

Opinion

Agenda for reforming school education

Anil Swarup | Updated on May 14, 2019

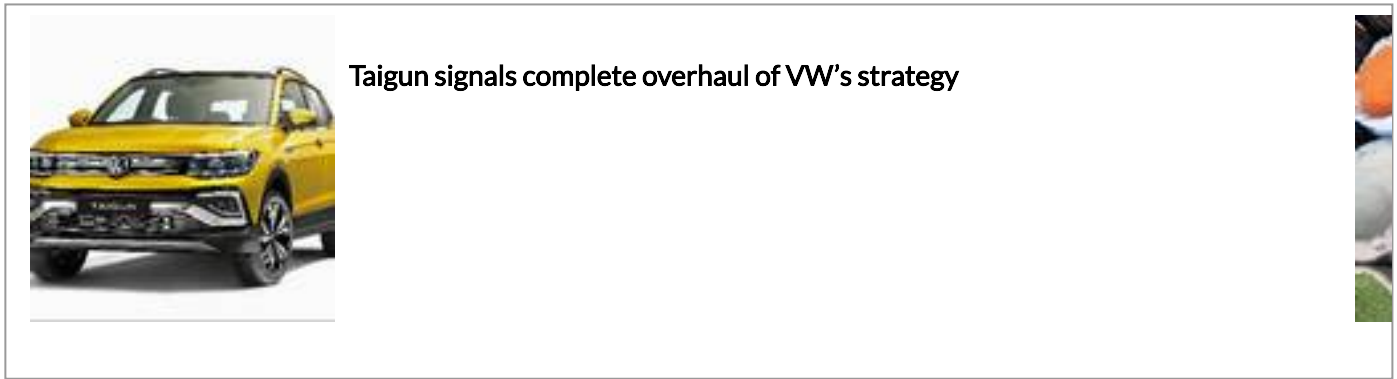


The new government must take forward the current government's initiatives on teachers' training, and initiate new steps

If you think education is expensive, wait until you see how much ignorance costs in the 21st century” – Barack Obama

Education lies “below priority line” for all political parties as most of them are looking for immediate political gains that are not forthcoming from this sector.

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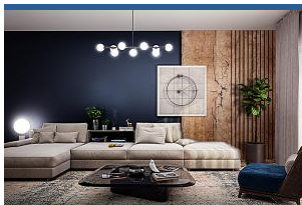


Hence, consciously oblivious of the consequences, political parties have chosen to ignore education. This can't go on in the interest of our children and for the future of the country.

Despite a reduction of budgetary allocation in real terms for school education and despite an average tenure of less than a year during the current NDA government, it did manage to take some initiatives, especially during the final three years, to address some of the issues that beset school education. Some such steps are listed below:

(i) The focus was shifted to the teachers and steps were taken to address issues relating to this critical segment. A crucial decision was taken in the context of pre-service training that is beset with mafias. There would now be integrated course of four years for Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.). This has the potential of eliminating non-existent teacher training colleges and would encourage only those that are keen on this profession to enrol.

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The government also amended the Right to Education Act to facilitate training of untrained/unqualified teachers. There were more than a million such teachers. In-service training was also put on a scientific pedestal through the use of “DIKSHA” portal.

(ii) The segmentation of school education was done away with as a comprehensive approach was adopted through the launch of Samagra Shiksha replacing the erstwhile segmented schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan. Pre-school was brought on the agenda for the first time as was intermediate education in terms of making these segments also eligible for funding.

(iii) Instead of pre-determining allocation of resources to each segment, States were given the freedom to determine priorities in the true spirit of cooperative federalism.

(iv) Public-private partnership was encouraged so as to leverage good work and practices with a view to scaling such practices. “Shaala Sarathi” portal was put in place to facilitate transparent interface between the Centre, State governments, NGOs and CSR Funding Agencies.

(v) Practicable and do-able action plans were prepared for the States of Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.

The new government does not necessarily have to waste its time on criticising and dumping all that has been done by the previous government (It will not be an issue if the same government comes to power).

It also need not attempt to evolve a new policy. Diagnosis and prescriptions on how to take education forward already exist.

The new government needs to get down to business and attempt to make things happen on the ground. First would be to take forward the initiatives of the present government to their logical conclusion and the second would be to launch initiatives where the current government either did not take any steps or failed to take them forward.

Focus on the teacher

The teacher has to be the focus as she lies at the pivot of education. The decision taken for four-year course for pre-service training has to be implemented in letter and spirit so that fraudulent training colleges close down. The recruitment of teachers has to be centralised and bereft of all malpractices. Some States have managed to do that. Other States can learn from them.

“DIKSHA” portal that has enormous potential needs to be strengthened further and leveraged for in-service training. It has many other facets, like maintaining teacher related data that can be utilised. Practices evolved in States such as Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh can be replicated.

Technology can be used to transform delivery of education in a manner that that learning becomes an enjoyable experience. States such as Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh are already doing that. Technology can also be used for ensuring attendance of teachers as has been successfully done in Chhattisgarh.

In a diverse country like ours we cannot have the same approach in all the States. Hence, each State requires different set of interventions in terms of teachers, curriculum, pedagogy and the like.

Practicable action plans need to be worked out for each State where in what needs to be done, how it will be done, who will do it and by when it will be done is clearly outlined.

The National Assessment Survey done in late 2017 can help in preparing such plans. The implementation of these plans will need to be facilitated and monitored.

Leveraging NGOs

Some NGOs like Akshara Foundation, Sampark Foundation, Kaivalya Foundation are doing phenomenal work in the field. These NGOs or the government alone cannot transform school education. However, together they have the potential to bring the desired turn around. Public-private partnership needs to be fostered.

There are a host of other issues relating to curriculum, vocational training, educating the girl child, school drop outs, value based education, children with special needs, ridiculous marking system in the examinations and private schools that will also need to be addressed. There is a crying need to transform school education. It can be done.

The writer is former Union Coal and Education Secretary

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