

Sarthak edit

Junking Subramanian panel recommendation unwise

The government has decided to junk the TSR Subramanian committee report on education reform, terming it a “mere compilation” of some older reports—the HRD ministry, as per a Business Standard report, will soon announce another committee that will give it a “fresh and comprehensive” report. While it is the government’s prerogative to accept, fully or partially, or reject a report it commissioned, junking a report that had many progressive recommendations is decidedly odd. It doesn’t help that the government delayed releasing the report and, when it did, some of the more radical suggestions appeared to have been removed. A leaked version of the original report had a recommendation—this was not there in the officially-released report—on banning political parties from universities. While banning political parties from the campus is unlikely to go down well with the political class considering this is where they get recruits from, junking the report entirely is akin to throwing the baby with the bathwater.

The committee’s other recommendations, for both school-level and higher education, could have proved truly transformative. It had talked of the need for a standing Education Commission to continually assess the changing circumstances of the education sector and advise the HRD ministry on the need to upgrade policy accordingly. At the school level, it proposed that the RTE Act be amended to include mandatory learning outcome norms—as it is with existing norms on infrastructure—and bringing minority institutions under the purview of applicability of the EWS quota. It had recommended that the selection of teachers for government schools be handled by an autonomous body, showing a way out of the corruption and politicisation that the process is enmeshed in. On the higher education front, it had called for a “flexible and nuanced” regulatory regime that allowed high-quality institutions much greater freedom than before on financial and administrative decisions—stopping just short of full autonomy, though—and for greater controls on institutes of a lower grade. The panel had suggested that accreditation of quality be made more outcome-based (to take into account, say, R&D output or industry perception of the institute) instead of being based on input metrics such as spending on

infrastructure. This would have attuned higher education to the needs of society and industry.

To be sure, while many of the recommendations it made represented a radical change from the past thinking, many others weren't entirely new. But, taken together, they could have proven a worthy template for the country's education policy. Therefore, even as the government sets up another panel, it would do well to retain the best of what the Subramanian panel had recommended. Given how explicitly beneficial these are, it wouldn't be a surprise if, ironically for the government that wanted something "fresh", the new panel reiterates some of these.