

Plan panel to meet, focus is education

By OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Sept. 12: When the full Planning Commission meets under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Thursday, "expansion" of the education sector during the 11th Five Year Plan is what it will be looking at. An expansion for which the Planning Commission has projected an outlay of Rs 2,69,673 crore during the 11th Plan period (2007-2012). Of this amount, a substantial portion has been projected for what the plan-body has dubbed "new initiatives". Under this category is listed higher education which has got an outlay of Rs 36,373 crores, skill development through polytechnics has an outlay of Rs 4,200 crores while the education mission through ICT has been allocated Rs 5,000 crores.

Technical education gets a substantial Rs 10,750 crore which is not surprising given the push the Centre is looking to give to this area. The Planning Commission has envisaged the setting up of eight IITs, 7 IIMs 20 IIITs among other technical institutions during the 11th Plan.

It also wants the expansion and upgradation of 200 state engineering colleges and seven Centrally-funded technical institutions. Significantly, the Plan-body also talks about "expansion as per the recommendations of the oversight committee" which had worked out a detailed plan to enable the Centre to provide for the 27 per cent quota for OBCs it had wanted to implement. The Supreme Court, however, stayed the Centre's move to implement the OBC quota. In terms of expanding higher education, the Planning Commission has suggested the setting up of 16 Central universities in states that have none so far and 370 colleges, among other things.

As for the government's flagship Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan aimed at universalising elementary education, the plan/body wants SSA transformed into a National Mission for Quality Elementary Education.

It also wants the enactment of a Central legislation which will make the right to free and compulsory quality elementary education a fundamental right.

This is an issue that has been opposed by many states given the substantial financial burden such an obligation will bring upon them.

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