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No-detention till Class VIII finally becomes a reality in Bengal

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Tags : Partha Chatterjee, Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, Writer's Buildings, Bengal

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Kolkata:

Nearly 18 months after the implementation of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in the country, and after numerous flip flops, the West Bengal Cabinet on Thursday finally approved the no-detention policy for students till class VIII.

Accepting the provision of the central Act, the state government, however, said examinations will continue.

State Commerce and Industries Minister Partha Chatterjee said after a Cabinet meeting at Writer's Buildings that students will not be detained till class VIII.

The note that the School Education Department principal secretary sent to the Cabinet on Thursday points to this clause in the Act. The note states that since the academic session of 1983-84, the state has been following a no-detention policy for children till class IV. But taking the policy it to the next level took a long time.

"No child admitted in a school shall be held back in any class or expelled till completion of elementary education," clause 16 of the RTE Act says.

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In West Bengal, the reason for the government's indecisiveness was differing viewpoints on the issue, particularly among teachers' unions and parents. Education is in the concurrent list, but since RTE is a central Act, its provisions are binding on the state government.

The Cabinet also decided that there will be no lottery for admission of children in primary classes.

The state government had in an notification last month pointed out that there will no screening test but students will be admitted on the basis of draw of lots.

"Lottery is a kind of gambling which can have adverse effect on the minds of children," said Bratya Basu.

Minister Partha Chatterjee said schools would have to independently decide how they are going to admit children and warned that the government will intervene if there are any allegations of

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corruption. The change in stand comes after public criticism of the lottery system.

Clause 13 of the Act discourages any kind of screening of children and their parents at the time of admission.

"We are happy that the state has finally decided to have a no-detention policy. There was lack of awareness in the society on it," said Vinod Kumar Tikoo, member of the National Commission of Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR).

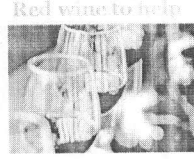
Tikoo, who was present at a public hearing of NCPCR last month, said several cases of detention of children in classes were reported at that time.

On the issue of admitting children, Tikoo said schools would have to decide the matter in consultation with their management committees. He said any kind of screening violated the act and could invite a penalty.

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