

THE STATESMAN

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Panel with statutory powers to sc

From Our Special Representative

NEW DELHI, Wednesday. - A two-tier mechanism is likely to be established to ensure the wholesomeness of textbooks used in schools throughout the country. A national commission with statutory authority will be the apex body, and a national screening committee will function under it according to the proposal now being mooted by the Department of Education in the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

The Home Ministry is under

stood to have cleared the proposal and it is now being examined by the Law Ministry. Should the latter also express itself in favour of the move, the proposal will be submitted to the Cabinet for its approval. As education is a concurrent subject, the Centre is treading carefully, lest haste lead to problems with the State Governments.

While the suggestion for a commission with statutory authority has been floating around for the last couple of years, the

current proposal is substantially different from the initial plan. Earlier it had been decided to merely upgrade the National Steering Committee (that has been functioning since 1991) to the level of a Commission, now a two-tier mechanism is being preferred.

The Department of Education appears to have taken the view that the 15-member Steering Committee, which also has special invitees at its meetings, might be too unwieldy to serve

as an effective Commission. At the same time, while a Commission with a limited number of members would function smoothly, it would be difficult for it to examine the very large number of textbooks in use throughout the country.

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The details, and fine-tuning will be undertaken, once the overall approval of the Cabinet is obtained.

The controversy over textbooks is nothing new. Way back in 1980, on the basis of a recommendation from Professor Nurul Hasan, then the vice-president of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, the Centre began evaluating the books to see that they did not militate against the ideals of national integration,

secularism, social equality and so on.

However, a crisis of sorts developed a decade later, when the Bharatiya Janata Party's Governments in four northern States set about attempting to re-write history and creating dangerous distortions.

The Department of Education is hopeful of its proposal for the two-tier mechanism obtaining the sanction of the Cabinet and the system being put in place, within the next few months.