

## EDUCATION FOR ALL NEEDS MORE THAN LAWS

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**I**T'S not enough to talk the talk, the government must walk its talk too, says Sanjiv Kaura, national coordinator of the National Alliance for Fundamental Right to Education (NAFRE). He is referring to the proposed 83rd amendment Bill that might get the Parliament nod in the next few months to make education a fundamental right for all children in the country.

After decades of politically-correct noises and grassroots struggle by voluntary organisations working in the field of educating

the young, came the five-bench Supreme Court judgement in 1993 that deemed that education must be a fundamental right. Eight years later, the Constitutional amendment is still in the offing. That free and universal education becomes a fundamental right is not enough, there are several other aspects to think through, say people like Kaura

An alliance of organisations from 14 states, NAFRE was formed in 1998 to lobby for the fundamental right. Over two days beginning Friday, NAFRE will hold its state convention to discuss the state of education in Maharashtra, connect with people

working with children and involved in formal and non-formal academics. State conventions will also help NAFRE prepare the ground for the national convention scheduled for mid-March. State conventions have been held already for Delhi, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil nadu and Rajasthan.

Maharashtra's alliance partner in NAFRE is Bal Shikshan Hakk Parishad chaired by the well-known social activist and author Vivek Pandit. Friday and Saturday will see, among others, state finance minister Jayant Patil, well-known leaders of all political parties, activists and educators

involved in the field and research analysts discuss how Maharashtra rates in the realm of education—reach, government commitment, budgets and spending—and what needs to be done.

Kaura is asking the governments — central and state — to walk their talk for the simple reason that though politicians have included free and universal education in their election manifestos and governments have routinely promised the earth, the financial commitment has been missing.

In fact, budget for education has seen a sharp drop in most states in the last few years. "There must be an irrevocable commit-

ment of minimum of six per cent," he says.

This is one of the six "positive changes" the NAFRE is demanding in the proposed Constitutional amendment on the basis of the draft circulated. The others are:

- **Age group:** The Bill seeks to cover children between 6 and 14. NAFRE says it must cover up to 18 years or Standard X, whichever is earlier and demands inclusion of children below six years

- **Compulsion on parents:** The Bill makes it fundamental duty of the parent/guardian to provide opportunities for education. NAFRE says this clause should be deleted because provision of edu-

cational opportunities should be the sole responsibility of the State.

- **Financial requirement:** NAFRE says the financial memorandum of the Bill must contain an irrevocable commitment by the State to spend a minimum of six per cent of national income on education.

- **Define 'free education':** Presently schooling is not totally free. NAFRE says free schooling must include fees, facilities for the differently abled, uniform, books, stationery, games and transport.

- **Define quality of education:** NAFRE says the Bill must specify provision of "equitable quality education".

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