

# 'Free for all' in unaided edu sector

■ The High Court order for setting up a mechanism to regulate fee in private schools have triggered a discussion, though it was stayed by the division bench. Most activists call for a decisive move by the state government while the managements doubt if the state indeed has the power to act on this subject. DC collates the ideas.

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KOCHI, AUG 6

The indifference shown by the successive state governments in the affairs of unaided schools under private managements has caused concern to those connected with education in the state. The absence of a policy has led to a 'free for all' in the sector, they said.

Kerala CBSE School Managements Association president T.P. M. Ibrahim Khan said that currently the state government does not have any powers to intervene and control the fees in CBSE schools in the state. "The CBSE schools are governed by CBSE affiliation and examination bylaws which clearly stipulate that the CBSE affiliated schools are at liberty to levy the fees commensurate with the facilities they provide," said Mr Ibrahim Khan.

He said that the implication is that the fees will vary from school to school. "The schools in the rural areas will not have the same facilities that are available in schools in the urban areas. So the fees will change. One percent of schools may be charging higher fees and they are using it for their infrastructure development which is allowed," said Mr Ibrahim Khan.

"In any case, CBSE schools are struggling these days and the number of students in the schools is coming down each year with state government offering a lot of facilities in government schools, including smart classrooms, free meals and others. This year there was a fall of 1.80 lakh students in CBSE schools in the state. Earlier, around 1400 CBSE schools had 15 lakh students," he said.

However, informed people send their wards to CBSE schools. "This year 15,000 students qualified in the NEET-UG exam out of the 16,000 CBSE students who appeared from the state. This is in contrast to 5000 state stream students who qualified in the exam out of 76,000 who appeared," he said.

KSU state president K. M. Abhijith said that it was high time the government regulated the sector in terms of fees charged

from unaided school students. "There is heavy exploitation in the sector, especially by CBSE schools. Parents who suffer in this do not reveal it fearing repercussions, including denial of admission or other impact. Some parents flaunt it as part of social status while some others who are afraid of being belittled among social groups also do not come forward to complaint," Abhijith said.

There should be an audit of the income and expenditure of the schools before fixing a fee for the schools. "The State Government should pass a law to appoint a fee regulatory committee for the same," Abhijith said.

SFI state secretary K.M. Sachin Dev said that his organization wanted to promote public educational institutions. The present LDF government's policies were aimed in that direction. "The curbs now in place for giving NOC to unaided schools, including CBSE schools, are part of this policy. There is no doubt that the fees in the existing schools should also be regulated. Many are influenced by money

power and we are of the opinion that money power should not be allowed in the educational sector. A regulatory body appointed by the state government is needed to regulate their fees and we welcome any step in that direction," said Sachin Dev. Many managements that could not successfully run self-financing engineering colleges were closing them down and starting CBSE schools. "This trend also should not be allowed," he said.

Mr Shajar Khan, secretary, Save Education Committee Kerala Unit, told DC that the successive state governments had shown a "criminal negligence" in fixing the fee structure of unaided private schools. "The government has the responsibility to fix a structure in the unaided school sector. The governments cannot turn away from such a responsibility," he said. According to Mr. Khan apart from the exorbitant amounts collected as tuition fees, the private school managements also extract huge amounts as capitation fees. Some of the schools in the unaided sector in the state are charging a



File picture of school children.

capitation fee of ₹2 lakh for admissions to LKG, he said.

Apart from the capitation and tuition fees, most schools also fleece students with development fees, festival fees etc, he said. He also lamented the inhuman treatment meted out to students and the parents by the school authorities. "The Save Education Committee on several occasions had to intervene following the requests made by agonizing parents. In most cases, we found the attitude of the managements and school authorities utterly inhuman," he said.

It is a matter of shame that some of these schools are run by persons speaking about spiritual values and harmony, he added.

Mr N. Sreekumar, general secretary of All-Kerala School Teachers Union, feels that the implementation of Rights to Education Act in letter and spirit will help address the problems caused by the unaided private school managements. Mr Sreekumar however also cautions about the government getting into the role of fee

regulator without a thorough study of the situation. "The government should intervene in the sector without bringing the burden of the responsibility of these schools into its shoulders", he said. The role of the government is to protect and promote government and government-aided schools. "The current fad about the unaided schools will end if the quality of education and facilities in the publicly-owned schools gain strength. The focus should be on education in public schools", he said.

Majority of the privately-owned unaided schools are for private entities. The primary motive of the promoters of these schools is profit and it is for the parents and students to realize this before making a decision, he said. The government is unable to implement the provisions of the Right to Education Act in letter and spirit, he added.

Although the state government has declared that it would close down the 3,500-odd schools functioning without recognition, action in this matter has been progressing at a snail's pace, he added.

## Division bench stays order for fee regulation panel

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KOCHI AUG 6

A division bench of the High Court on Monday stayed the order of a single bench asking the state government to consider setting up a mechanism for regulating fees charged by schools under the private management in the state. The division bench stayed the order for two weeks on a writ petition filed by the school management of Sri Sri Ravishankar Vidya Mandir at Cheppanam near Panangad in Ernakulam district against the single bench order directing the school management to readmit five students expelled from the school. The division bench has posted the case for further hearing on next Monday.

The school management has expelled five students following objections raised by their parents against fees imposed by the school. The division bench order came even as the school

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management has refused to readmit the expelled students as per the order of the single bench. The main grouse of the school management against parents of the expelled students is that they have created a ruckus in the school by staging protest against the fee hikes.

In an interim order issued on August 2, the single bench has directed the school authorities to readmit the students on the

ground that the children should not suffer because of the fight between the school management and the parents. The single bench has also pointed out that such disputes are caused due to the absence of a mechanism to fix the fee in private schools in the state and directed the state government to consider forming an appropriate mechanism for the regulation of fees in the state.