

# Saffron Chimera to Hide Modi Government's War on Students!

**SFI**

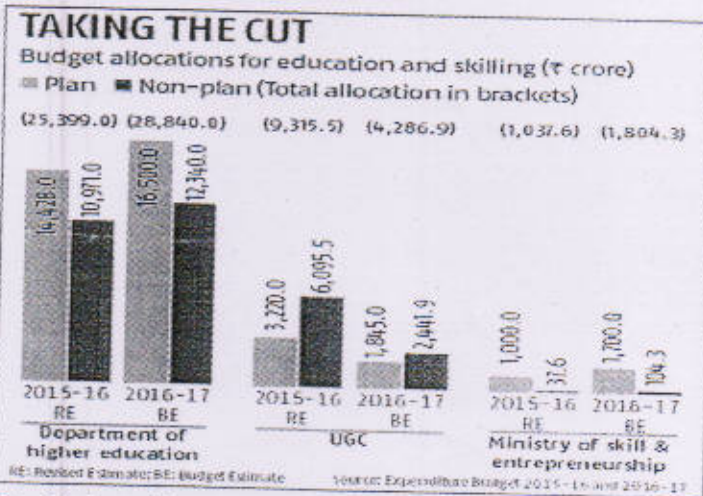
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The policy trajectory of the RSS-BJP led NDA government is a toxic combination of neoliberal assaults and regressive hindutva is amply clear. Modi government's general budget has gone on to accentuate the economic burdens on all sections of working people, including the students. The saffron chimera of Hindutva is being used not only to break people's unity but also to act as a smokescreen to hide the ruthless economic assaults on the people.

## Budget Cut

Share of expenditure in education as a percentage of the total central budget is just 3.6% which is 0.2% less than the revised estimates for the year 2015-16. The same figure in terms of the percentage of the total GDP is meagre 0.5%.

The budgetary allocation for ICDS has seen a sharp fall of 1500 Crores, which will directly affect the mid-day meal scheme in the primary schools. This goes against the Supreme Court ruling, which called for universalization of the scheme- that would have required additional outlay of 10000 Crores. Allocation for school education has been cut from Rs 69794 Crores in 2015-16 to Rs 63826 Crores.



The Budget allocation for the University Grants Commission (UGC), which provides funds and maintains standards in institutions of higher education, has been cut by almost 55 per cent, from Rs 9315.45 crore in 2015-16 to Rs 4286.94 crore in 2016-17. This has happened even though the actual layout for the higher education sector has increased marginally. It is because of the fact that funds meant for UGC have been diverted to Rashtriya Uchhtar Shiksha Abhiyaan (RUSA) a new body called HEFA. (The impact of this shall be outlined in the next section). The fund cuts for UGC will directly affect the fellowships in universities, the infrastructure and the overall academic standards in our public universities.

## Diverting Public Money to Private Institutions

Finance minister in his speech has talked about an 'enabling regulatory architecture' for 10 public and 10 private educational institutions to be made 'world-class'. This will enhance the dual education model that on hand creates a miniscule number of so-called centres of excellence, while the vast majority of institutions are forced to be cash-starved. Another disturbing feature is the inclusion of 10 private institutions in this framework, which is progression of the regressive outlook of RUSA and other such academic reforms which have been seeking to divert public funds to private players ( while there is no social control over the fees, infrastructure, teaching etc. in these institutions).

A Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA) is being setup with initial base capital of Rs. 1000 crore. Finance Minister in his speech has said that 'These funds will be used to finance improvement in infrastructure in our top institutions and will be serviced through internal accruals.' This again means: 1) Diversion of funds to select few institutes 2) Linking of funds to the financial performance of the institutes ( since internal accruals basically refers to the accumulation of retained earnings and depreciation charges).

Further, for the Rashtriya Uchhtar Shiksha Abhiyaan (RUSA), a provision of Rs 1,300 crore has been made in the Budget, up from Rs 1,155 crore in the current financial year. The centrally sponsored scheme launched in 2013 aims at providing strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions. Rashtriya Uchhtar Shiksha Abhiyaan (RUSA), which was introduced by the Congress-led UPA-II government and has been carried further by the BJP-led NDA government, replaces the pre-existing multiple funding mechanisms with one centralised mechanism. The funding then is linked to a set of conditions failing which the institutions/states won't be eligible to receive funds. These conditions include implementation of Choice Based Credit System (CBCS), semesterization and compulsory accreditation among others. The same document makes it clear that the funding under RUSA will be norm based as well as performance based. This means that the state governments or universities will not have any room to modify the system according to their specific conditions and all powers to determine their education are snatched away from them. Funding will be linked to performance of the institution based on set criteria (which would include student-teacher ratio, infrastructure, examination results etc.). This would effectively spiral into increasing the already existing inequalities. For example, let us consider St. Stephen's College in Delhi and Rajendra Mishra College in Saharsa, Bihar. If funding is linked to accreditation, then St. Stephen's College will continue getting more funds every year due to better 'indicators'. Rajendra Mishra College, which needs more funds to enhance its infrastructure, will actually keep on getting less and lesser funds every year. Hence, this performance-based approach to funding will actually widen the existing gulf. RUSA has provision to divert funds to even such institutions, which do not fall under section 12B and 2(f) of the UGC Act. This translates into provision of diverting the public money (tax collected from the working class and other toiling sections) to fund the private institutions, which are anyways free to charge exorbitant fees.

In the nutshell this budget carries forward the neoliberal philosophy of limiting the public expenditure on education, while at the same time shamelessly seeks to divert people's money to the hand of fraudulent privatized players. At a time when student movement is showing remarkable against the RSS' assaults over democracy and universities, we can not afford to be oblivious of the economic attacks over the students.

The review committee set up by MHRD on the non-NET fellowships has to submit its report by the end of December, 2015. But, a notification sent on Feb. 22 has given an extension till 31st march. When a budget cut has already been made, one is forced to think what really will the recommendations of this committee mean in effective terms.  
Another hogwash!