Free, compulsory education for children in ICT

Speakers for same initiative in provinces

OUR STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD - A seminar to share the details and understand the implications and further plans with regard to Article 25-A on Free and Compulsory Education especially with regard to provincial ministries was held on Thursday wherein the ministers from various political parties pledged their commitment to pursue similar legislations in their respective provinces.

United Nations Scientific, Educational, Culture, and Communication Organization (UNESCO) had organized the event.

Educationist and PPP Senator Dr. Sarfraz Bugti highlighted all the other political parties for their prompt unanimous support to get the Bill passed. "I'm glad for once we all showed our joint responsibility - though this Bill is passed only for Islamabad, I'm sure this will provide impetus to other provinces too, to make Pakistan literate," he remarked.

"As politicians, it is our moral duty to reduce our political gains for a legislation like this, I hope soon this bill would also be passed by the Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," said Senator Haji Adeel of ANP.

UNESCO Representative, Dr. Reza Kay Najaba, congratulated all the Senators saying, "The passage of the Bill itself is a historic milestone towards 'Education For All in Pakistan', and the outcome is great! And the whole process has set an example that how democratic society reflects voices of the people through their elected representatives."

Under the passed bill, the newly formed Ministry of Capital Administration and Development (CAD) will be responsible to implement this Bill to provide free, compulsory and quality education to all children in ICT. This means that up to age 16, the education of all boys and girls will be free with all facilities ensuring safety of the students, giving special attention to the disadvantaged children without any discrimination. The Bill also calls upon private schools to admit 15% of underprivileged students belonging to the neighborhood in each class.

"Pakistan's Senate has taken a lead to pass this Bill - the quickest in the history; I have seen these policy level bills taking ages in the National Assembly, but due to the great cause and unity of Senators from various political parties, the Bill just took a few hours in the Senate to get approved and have taken a lead over rest of the provinces," said Prof. Rafiq Tahir, Joint Secretary CAD.

As a next step, for the implementation of the bill, the CAD and Federal Directorate of Education will now initiate the process by framing and notifying the rules under this bill, preparing an Action Plan for rolling out and expanding access and ensuring enrolment of every child living in Islamabad Capital Territory. This will also require allocation of additional resources to implement this constitutional obligation.

With a strenuous effort of two years, the Senate has finally passed the Bill to legally recognize and elaborate the provision of free and compulsory education to more than 70,000 out of school children of age 5 to 16, in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) setting a positive precedence for Provincial Education Departments to follow suit and initiate similar legislations in their Assemblies.

As per the recent 18th Amendment and insertion of Article 25-A in the Constitution, it is now the State's responsibility to ensure all boys and girls up to age 16, including refugees and migrant children, attend school. Article 25-A was made part of the Constitution during April 2018 but the legislation to enact this right was pending since then.