

## ***Minimum Cost for Universal Elementary Education***

First of all, I try to calculate bare minimum total estimated cost which may be required for providing education with acceptable standard to all the children from kindergarten to upper primary school in the age group of 4 to 14 years. Presently, the Government of India is targeting children of age group 6 to 14 years for universal elementary education but it would be better if all the children from 4 years onwards are covered under universal elementary education, as is usually

practised by most of the parents, who can afford it for their children.

To my mind, the bare minimum staff, whereby an upper primary school can be run under normal conditions, should consist of at least eleven teachers and four attendants as under:

1. Three teachers with minimum High School/ Intermediate qualification who can teach children of kindergarten to Class II and can be paid @ Rs.3000/- per month.
2. Three teachers with minimum Intermediate qualification who can teach children up to Class V and can be paid @ Rs.3000/- per month.
3. Five teachers with minimum graduate qualification, who can teach children up to Class VIII and can be paid @ Rs.3500/- per month. At least one of which should be able to properly impart training for games, sports, and yoga, to the school children; and one of these teachers can be given the charge of the school. The incharge of the school and one extra teacher can ensure that every teacher avails of at least one free period daily. These teachers can also take care of the school children during leave period of some teacher(s) of the school, so that the children remain usefully occupied throughout the duration of the school without vacant periods.
4. Attendants (if possible, class V pass) who can be paid @ Rs.2000/- per month.

Considering that there are 240 million children in the age group of 4 to 14 years, living in around 1.1 million habitations (some of which will have schools up to class V only due to smaller population), and one teacher caters to a class of about

30 children then roughly eleven million teachers will be required, i.e., three million teachers of category 1; three million teachers of category 2; and five million teachers of category 3. Besides this, four million attendants of category 4 will also be required. Total expenses on engagement of the aforesaid number of teachers and attendants are computed below:

1. First category of teachers:  
 $3 \text{ million} \times 3000 \times 12 \approx 108 \text{ billions}$
2. Second category of teachers:  
 $3 \text{ million} \times 3000 \times 12 \approx 108 \text{ billions}$
3. Third category of teachers:  
 $5 \text{ million} \times 3500 \times 12 \approx 210 \text{ billions}$
4. Attendants:  $4 \text{ million} \times 2000 \times 12 \approx 96 \text{ billions}$
- Total Expenses  $\approx 522 \text{ billions}$

However, as per an advertisement released by the Central Government, recently, 4.1 million teachers and 1.1 million schools (primary and upper primary schools) are already in operation and are being supported under *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*. The Government also claimed during the presentation of its interim budget for 2009-10 that about 98 percent of habitations are already covered with primary schools. Moreover, a lot many private schools are also in operation, and a large number of these are also functioning very well. In view of the above, the total additional expenses on employment of additional teachers and attendants will be far less than the above estimated figure of Rs.522 billion, it may be guesstimated to be only Rs.300 billion, for proceeding further.

**It is proposed that only female teachers should be appointed for teaching children up to class VIII. Employing only female teachers in schools up to class VIII will have several benefits, some of which are enumerated below:**

- **School children can be taught and looked after well with affection.**
- **Physical exploitation of young boys and girls prevalent at many places by the male teachers can be stopped altogether.**
- **Females will get jobs in close vicinity of their residences, thereby inducing feeling of comfort and greater safety in their minds.**
- **Usually teachers enjoy iconic status in their localities thus when the lady teachers will be exclusively appointed, the movement for empowerment of females will receive a big boost, much more than all the various government schemes have so far yielded together, in this endeavour.**

These teachers should be trained so that they can also impart purposeful education regarding primary healthcare and hygiene, too, besides teaching concerned subjects. Games and Sports can also be given a grass-root level boost through these schools in a systematic manner, thus facilitating all-round development of our children.

Such a school should also run a crèche (like, *Anganwadies*) with the help of its female attendants, so that children of the age group 6 months to 4 years of working mothers could also be looked after here. For the purpose, existing *Anganwadi* workers can also be attached for the job of running the crèche. However, it would be far superior if instead of *Anganwadi* workers, some working mothers, having babies up to the age of 4 years, are appointed on payment basis (equivalent to the wages payable to the school attendants), turn by turn, to help in the running of the crèche. In this way, they can continue to earn some remuneration, when it is difficult for them to undertake outdoor jobs due to their young babies, and, at the

same time, the whole process of looking after of the kids will receive much needed motherly care and loving touch, which is just not possible with existing *Anganwadi* workers, who will most likely perform this task in mechanical manner. Whereas the mothers whose kids will also stay in the same crèche, will have much higher personal stake and perform their work more hygienically as well as with a lot of enthusiasm and sincerity, which will make the entire scheme a big success.

For better implementation of the programme for universalizing education, these teachers and the attendants should be the residents of concerned villages/municipal wards, where these schools are situated. If suitable teachers/ attendants are not available in the same village/municipal ward, only then persons of neighbouring villages/wards should be employed. If teachers, attendants, and students are local then a lot of time, effort, and money can be saved on their commuting to and fro to the school. Also, the low emoluments as prescribed here will not look unattractive, if the local residents take up the job of the teachers/attendants. Presently, also, a vast majority of private schools pay absurdly low wages, often less than Rs.2000/- per month, to their teachers. Thus to begin with the prescribed wages of Rs.3000/-, Rs.3500/-, Rs.2000/-, for respective teachers and attendants, do not seem to be so unattractive, more so because the needy educated youth will get instant employment in their own localities. Moreover, *Shiksha Mitra*, appointed by the various state governments, who help in teaching in schools, are also employed on near about the same level of wages, whereas the wages of the *Anganwadi* workers and *Anganwadi* helpers which were hiked in the Union Budget 2008-09 of India, still stand at Rs.1500/- p.m. and Rs.750/- p.m., respectively.

These teachers and attendants should be selected by the elected/nominated *panches* and *head-panches* of their locality.

Salary of these teachers should be hiked on assessment of their performance on pre-fixed parameters, which should include opinion of the children, their parents, and a central level assessment which should judge academic performance as well as the rate of growth of learning of the school children. Also, government grants to villages/wards should be linked to the level of academic performance as well as rate of growth of the learning of their school children. The better the children perform in central assessment, the more grant for development of their village/ward should be given. Also, it would be a better idea to allocate funds even to respective blocks or *tehsils* or districts, based on the level of academic performance as well as the rate of growth of academic performance of the school children in their jurisdiction, instead of allowing the local area M.L.A. or Member of Parliament to exercise discretion in sanctioning schemes for the development of various localities of his/her constituency, as otherwise it will take out the coercion out of the motivating process which is to act as a big catalyst for speedy and wide-spread development of education in the country. Because education is the ultimate panacea for curing most of the ills plaguing this country, and this has to be forced upon and necessary stimulus should be thrust for it in whatever way it is possible, even if it amounts to exerting pressure on the concerned individuals, in particular, and the whole society, in general. If we link the development of a region with the rate of growth of education and the level of education of the children, it will coax all concerned to work for development of education of children and this sustained pressure can uplift education level of this country in the shortest possible time.

This way, all concerned would strive to ensure that meaningful education is imparted to their school children as

well as it is assimilated by them. *Panches* and *head-panches* will select best available teachers in the first instance itself, otherwise, they themselves will lose goodwill in their localities. Teachers will put in their best efforts and teach students as per their ultimate capacity because it will ensure hike in their salary as well as renewal of their future terms as teachers. All residents would also collectively desire that their children should do well in education because it will bring more development to their village/ward, which would be visible to them immediately, though the long-term benefits in terms of empowerment of their whole society will be enjoyed by all of them later as its sweet reward will spread gradually.

### **Engage Local Teachers and Attendants for Schools**

Here, I shall plead again that the appointment of teachers/attendants of upper primary schools should be made from the local populace only, as the welfare of their locality and its children will rule supreme in their minds. Also, for upholding their image in their locality, they will strive to put up their best show. Presently, government primary school teachers are, usually, appointed as per their academic merit, whether they have right aptitude for teaching or not. Since, these school teachers are offered good salaries, and comparable job opportunities are limited elsewhere, thus, whosoever gets job of a teacher in a government school, he/she just grabs it, wherever it is available. When these government teachers are posted in far flung areas, they find themselves in a Catch-22 situation because of several constraints, the foremost of these is that many a time they have their established set up, like, permanent house, service of spouse, schools of their children, elderly parents, immovable properties, etc., at other places. In this condition, neither they can make permanent residence at the place of their posting nor they can give up their much

sought after government job, as it is lucrative enough in comparison with other private jobs. In the government jobs, they enjoy the safety net of the government security and are rarely held responsible even when they fail to discharge their duties with satisfaction. In these compelling circumstances, these teachers are not left with any other option but either to arrange their establishment at two places or to commute between their residences and the place of their postings, which seriously impinges upon their ability to discharge their duties satisfactorily.

Also, there are thousands of primary schools in India which are run with one teacher only. How can it be justified? Sometimes in these single teacher schools, the teacher opens up gates of the school and its classrooms besides setting up the school to function; its natural outcome is below par teaching in the schools.

This, under performance of schools is one of the main reasons, that it alienates people from sending their children to schools. Well to do parents supplement poor teaching in the schools by arranging private tuitions for their children but poor and illiterate people can neither afford it financially nor are able to provide academic support by themselves at their homes, thus their children remain deprived from meaningful education and later drop out from the schools.

So, if we want to improve the level of education in our schools then we will have to initiate comprehensive reforms. But in this endeavour, no amount of money or wishful thinking can make a significant impact on quality of school education in India, until accountability of all concerned is clearly demarcated. The GOI has committed large sums of money to universalize elementary education in the country, duly backed by mid-day meals for school children, but surveys undertaken

by various NGOs, like, *Pratham* in 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, revealed that it has merely increased enrolment of children in the schools without making any significant impact on the literacy level of these children. Thus, mid-day meal scheme can increase attendance level of students but it cannot ensure quality education for students. It also surfaced in the surveys undertaken by many NGOs that more than fifty percent of the students of age group 7 to 10 years can neither read a simple sentence correctly nor write an easy sentence dictated to them. More than half of such children cannot solve simple sums of arithmetic operations.

Thus, I emphasize that it will be naïve to assume that higher salaries can alone ensure quality teaching in schools as can also be deciphered from the following example: A sample survey, conducted by Education Department of Chhattisgarh in December, 2007, revealed that more than two-third government primary and middle school teachers failed, when they were asked to solve problems of mathematics books of class 1 to 5 and class 6 to 8, respectively, (Source: *Business Standard* dated 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2008).

In fact, the seed of recklessness gets planted in many small children in the early phase of their lives itself because of below par behaviour of their teachers, while these teachers are expected to put up their best performance in schools because children grow considering them as their role models.

**Thus, if the Government feels that it has discharged its obligation towards the masses, just by establishing some more schools and appointing some more teachers who are selected and deployed in a purely mechanical manner, then the curse of illiteracy is bound to persist in India. Here, we do not need just a limited number of ill-motivated and constrained teachers, who are selected only because they**

**have the stamp of B.Ed. pass qualification. Instead, we need dedicated and stress-free teachers in sufficient number, albeit with lower paper qualification even at a lower salary (if the Government lacks resources), who are personally attached to the welfare of the children to whom they teach and at the same time they can be held accountable in case of unsatisfactory performance of their pupils. And the local teachers can easily fit in this category.**

Another significant factor which underlines indifference of government teachers towards the welfare of the students is that these teachers are never held accountable for the poor performance of their students. Jobs of the teachers should hinge on their ability to impart knowledge to the students. If they are not suitable to be teachers for practical purposes, they should be provided with other jobs than teaching students. **If we care not to spoil our future, for God's sake we should take out unwilling and/or incompetent teachers from the profession of teaching though they can be provided with alternative jobs, in lieu thereof. I do not say their jobs be snatched away, I just plead that they should be given other jobs for which they are suitable.** I shall illustrate below as to how central assessment should be carried out to gauge the level of learning of the school children, which in turn can revolutionize the growth of education in this country in most sustainable manner.

### **Central Assessment for Development of Education**

Annual Examinations conducted at the school level or above cannot be taken for granted as the true indicator of the level of learning of students, more so when their conduct can be influenced in a major way, at least in the far flung areas or other places which are poorly supervised. Sometimes

manipulations are perpetuated at the level of the teachers and sometimes by the school management, itself. In most of the above cases, the apparent motive is to show-case that the students are learning well, because respective teachers and/or school management are keen to paint a rosy image of the state of affairs of their school and its students for personal reasons.

In such circumstances, the tool of the examination which has the primary purpose of gauging the true progress of imparting knowledge to the students, is applied in just opposite direction, i.e., it is used to mask the actual level of transfer of knowledge to the students.

**In fact, there are two main purposes of conducting examinations, first of all, these are conducted to provide much needed feedback to the teacher that how far he/she was successful in transferring knowledge to his/her students and secondly, these are held to provide feedback to the students (and their parents) that how far they were able to grasp knowledge transmitted to them. In this manner, the tool of examination acts as a friendly reminder for the teachers as well as for the students to initiate remedial action to make-up the shortfall observed in their respective efforts.**

Additionally, the examinations also act as a motivation booster for the students to improve quality of their learning as well as induce the feeling of competitiveness among the peers to excel. Further, the periodic examinations can also act as check-points and reminders for the teachers to complete the transfer of knowledge to the students as per the contents prescribed in the syllabus, by the scheduled time-frame.

In majority of cases, the aforesaid discussed roles of examination have been, somehow, relegated to the back-seat. Many a time, these examinations are used to camouflage the

real progress of students, thereby masking the existing shortfall in teaching-learning process. Sometimes, these are also used by the teachers to exert pressure on the students and their parents for personal gains.

Therefore, I think that the ritual of conducting half-yearly examinations and annual examinations and linking them with the promotion of students to the higher classes, at least up to class VIII, needs re-consideration. School authorities should conduct periodic examinations to have regular feedback for themselves as well as for the students and their parents. But the final criterion on whose basis promotion of students to higher classes should be determined, should be linked to a combination of their performance in school based periodic examinations and a central external assessment, say, on a 50:50 basis.

The role of external assessment is paramount in the initial phase, till education system attains maturity, so as to ensure that the students are properly taught and not merely pushed to higher classes just to project that all is well in teaching-learning process. In this context, the central external assessment would help in inducing much needed accountability in teaching-learning process. The process of central assessment is illustrated below and can be fine tuned further, if the Government takes interest in it.

1. The first step in this direction starts with compilation of question banks for all the main subjects, like, Languages, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies, for all the classes up to upper primary level (Class I to VIII). These question banks should be divided into four parts for every class and for every subject. Part I should consist questions from the full syllabus of the previous class. Part II should comprise questions from

the first quarter of the syllabus prescribed for that class as well as the full syllabus of the previous class. Part III should comprise questions from the first-half of the syllabus of that class. Part IV should comprise questions from the first three quarters of the syllabus of that class.

2. As a second step, district level mobile teams, each comprising about four members should be constituted to carry out external assessment of the academic performance of the students of different schools, through out the year turn by turn. For the purpose of conducting external assessment, every session should be divided into four parts, viz., (1) July to September, (2) October to December, (3) January to March, and (4) April to June. If a team visits a school during July to September, questions from the Part I of the question bank should be asked which should be generated automatically by the computer using random selection process just before the conduct of the examination. Similarly, if a team visits during October to December, January to March, and April to June then questions for the external assessment should be generated automatically from Parts II, III, and IV, of the question bank, respectively, by the computer just before the conduct of the examination. Division of an academic session in four parts may vary as per the geographical locations and weather constraints in different regions of the country.

Because questions based on the syllabus of the previous class will also be asked during Part I and Part II of the external assessment, it would ensure that the students are taught in such a way that they are able

to retain the knowledge communicated to them in a sustainable manner and that teaching is not done just to satisfy the requirements of external assessment. Questions of the question bank should be of general type, which test general understanding of the students. These can be designed by experienced teachers on national or state level. The students should not be required to have any specific preparation for these external assessments. The questions of these external assessments should be friendly in nature, which could stimulate thinking process, without much focus on the rote memory of the students. It is true that writing skills of the students cannot be assessed in these types of assessments but these can be looked after by the school teachers during periodic examinations. Because when the students would understand the subject then they can easily develop writing skills, too.

3. The members of a mobile team, before proceeding for inspection of a school, should assemble at the designated centres in the morning and run computerized programme to randomly select, (a) the school, (b) its classes, and (c) the subjects for which external assessment is to be carried out. This information should get recorded in the central computer in a non-erasable manner as it is done in an electronic voting machine which registers polled votes.
4. The mobile team should go to the school which has been picked up by the computer and arrange for conducting assessment of the students as described below.
5. Each team should be equipped with, say, 20 no. laptop computers, each fitted with a web camera and a sound

recorder. In this way, if one hour objective-type examination of a subject is to be conducted then examination of one class consisting of, say, 30 to 40 students can be completed in two hours. This way comprehensive and temper-proof central external assessment of at least two randomly selected classes, for randomly selected subjects, of a randomly selected school can be completed in one day with ease.

6. After the conduct of the external assessment, the recorded data can be uploaded to the main server computer maintained at state/central level, in the afternoon by the mobile team members, through the master computer installed at the centre with which the team members are associated. Thus, these records of conduct of examination can be monitored, checked, and audited for authenticity by the district level officers or even regional/state/central level officers on day to day basis.
7. The web cameras and sound recorders attached to laptop computers, capturing live recording of the conduct of examination, can ensure that external assessment is completely objective, transparent, and free from human intervention or manipulation.
8. Because of computerized assessment, the result of external assessment will be available immediately to the students, the teachers, the school management as well as the district level monitors, without any additional effort. This result can throw light on the areas of weaknesses of the students, for which desired remedial measures can be initiated by the teachers and the school management quite early. Now, the Government will not have to wait till the students are

assessed by board level examinations or some NGOs conduct surveys and highlight weaknesses in the learning of the students. In either of the two cases, vital-time gets lost and rate of growth of education in the country remains stunted thereby undermining the progress and prosperity of the entire nation.

**Moreover, the central external assessment will instantly inject a sense of responsibility and accountability among the teachers and the school management, and take away the feeling of complacency and lethargy from every corner of school education system in the government-aided schools of the country.**

**It is true that the central assessment teams can neither visit every school quite frequently nor assess all the students in all the subjects. But still due to the element of surprise in the process of selection of schools, its classes, and the subjects - thanks to the computerized random selection process - every school management and its teachers would always remain sincere and vigilant lest they should be caught short of their efforts towards satisfactory teaching of students.**

Thus even when all the students of a school cannot be assessed in one visit of a central team, still students would be busy learning satisfactorily throughout the year so that they do not perform poorly in the central external assessment and this can happen only when the teachers impart them meaningful teaching continuously without any slackness. This will facilitate spread of education and its assimilation by a large majority of masses throughout our country in the truest sense and in the shortest possible time.

**Some incentives for good performing schools and their good teachers, can significantly increase motivation level of all concerned and it will exhort them to put up their best**

**show, which in turn will induce dramatic improvement in growth of education in this country. The present system of school education breeds inaction mainly because neither the good performers are rewarded nor the poor ones penalized. Moreover, in the present system of school education, it is also very difficult to distinguish between good teachers and below par teachers. In the proposed system of central assessment, good teachers can be easily identified and thereby rewarded for their good performance. For the rest, suitable measures can be initiated so that either they improve themselves or drop from teaching profession and take up other jobs for which they are more suitable.**

To ensure the success of the entire operation of the central external assessment, at least the following two things must be ensured:

- Information Technology (IT) enabled services and laptop computers should remain in working condition without obstruction, which can be done with great ease by roping in reputed IT firms, for which there is no dearth in this country.
- Security and transportation of personnel of central mobile teams and their equipment to the schools, should be meticulously arranged, for this purpose local police post personnel and designated *panches* of the areas should be made fully responsible.

**The need for central-assessment regarding level of learning of students in an unambiguous manner, is urgently required because the existing school education of the country is not delivering desired results, as has been amply illustrated in earlier presentation. Also, the existing mechanism of inspecting the work of the students in schools has utterly failed because of deeply entrenched corruption in public life.**

The existing inspection system of assessing students' performance can be easily manipulated by the inspectors of schools for monetary gains or for other considerations because they themselves are rarely held accountable even if they fail in bringing out the rot from the system, barring a few ceremonial actions which are taken during visits of high profile dignitaries, like, ministers, which, too, are later quashed by courts for want of desired follow up action on the part of the government machinery. Thus these district level physical inspections are just eye-wash and wastage of the government money. It is needless to say that when the short-comings in school education system are not visible pinpointedly, concrete actions, too, cannot be initiated to remedy the problem areas in good time. The existing unproductive and irresponsible school education system of the country is holding back millions of people from receiving good education. Only meaningful education can change their destiny and lead them towards the path of empowerment. Accordingly, shortcomings in our school education system should be addressed unfailingly at least, now, lest it should be too late and we will be left behind in this new-age world which is driven by technology.

The approach of central external assessment and assured success thereafter, as discussed above, is fail-proof, provided required follow up action is taken on the outcome of these computerized external assessments. In the proposed system of assessment, human intervention to influence the result of the external assessment is almost negligible. The assessment so carried out can be processed and audited at various levels, with the pictures and sound of the students as well as the date and time of conduct of external assessment in perfectly authentic manner.

Moreover, the visiting central teams can also record pictures of all the students with their teachers, along with its date and time. It will ensure that all the children are motivated, cared, and encouraged to go to schools, otherwise they will not come to schools and it will be visible in the pictures recorded during the visits of central teams. Attendance level of school teachers will also improve on its own without any additional effort in this regard, due to the element of surprise in selection of schools for inspection. The visits of the central teams will also ensure that the school management does not fudge attendance record of the children as well as the teachers of the school.

**Fudging of attendance record of children of government-aided schools is rampant these days because it facilitates siphoning off funds ear-marked for mid-day meals of the children. It has also been observed that many private schools only exist on paper, in such cases, appointment of teachers, enrolment of students, and other related aspects are just bogus, but the people running such bogus schools continue to receive grants from the Government with the connivance of government officials. It has also been reported as to how many schools send bloated enrolment figures of admission of students in their schools and then draw stipends on behalf of fictitious enrolment figures from social welfare departments of the Government. I am not saying these things with a figment of imagination; newspaper reports often splash headlines as to how unscrupulous people exploit porous education system of our country to earn quick money and in the process inflict irreparable loss to the entire nation by retarding development of its people. Bloated enrolment figures of school children give false sense of relief that school education is improving**

*Minimum Cost for Universal Elementary Education*

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**in our country, but ground realities are different. All such malpractices will evaporate in thin air without trace, if central assessment is implemented rigorously.**

The approximate cost on constituting a mobile team is estimated below:

Salary of four team members per annum (say, Rs.15,000/- p.m. per person)	Rs.720,000
Annual lease and maintenance cost of 20 laptop computers (say, Rs.5000/- p.a. per lap top computer)	Rs.100,000
Cost of transportation of team members and stationery etc. (say, Rs.900/- per day for 200 working days)	Rs.180,000
Total >>>	Rs.1.0 million

If we consider at least four visits per school and total 200 visits of a mobile team per year, we find that around Rs.1.0 million per annum will be recurring expenses on monitoring performance of 50 schools (or about 12,000 students considering 240 students per school). Accordingly, the average cost for central external assessment per student will be around Rs.83/- per annum, which is minuscule and about 0.5 percent of the existing recurring cost of Rs.12,000 to Rs.20,000 per annum per child, which is entailed presently by the various state governments of the country in government-aided schools.

If we consider that there are 1.1 million schools then 22 thousand mobile teams would be required in all and total expenses on maintenance of these mobile teams would be Rs.22 billion (22,000 × 1.0 million) per annum. These expenses on deployment of mobile teams for central assessment of

government-aided school can bring a sea-change in the quality of education being imparted to school-children these days, besides unleashing cultural change in the whole society as a result of thus evolved school education system which will be transparent, responsive, and accountable in every respect. **Thus, it can be stated with conviction that this centralized external assessment can unfailingly expedite the pace for achieving 100 percent functional literacy and fulfilling the goal of universal school education in the country in the shortest possible time, not only in terms of statistics but in real spirit, too.**

However, it is added that to render the entire process of centralized external assessment - efficient, cost effective as well as free of worries from day to day management - this can also be outsourced to private IT firms of the country, which have attained respectability and global stature, now. And, the Government of India can monitor and audit their reports, for initiating a follow up action.

There is another item, which needs government help in boosting education level of the students, and it is the need of the books and the stationery. On an average, about Rs.200/- per child per annum would be sufficient for providing basic books and basic stationery for their studies up to class VIII level. Instead of cash subsidy, students should be provided this study material from the schools directly, which will cost approximately Rs.48 billion (200 × 240 million children). Say, a grant of Rs.10,000/-, can also be sanctioned per annum to every school in the form of supply of black-boards, chalk, duster, furniture, etc., as per their requirements. And, if there are 1.1 million schools then the total expenses on material cost for these schools would be around Rs.11 billion (10,000 × 1.1 million).

However, it is estimated that the Government of India has already appointed about 0.8 million teachers during 2004-08 under universal access to basic education in the country. Many of the existing primary school or upper primary school teachers, who are paid from the government exchequer, would also be well qualified and thus they can be pushed to augment the deficit of teachers in the secondary schools of the country. Some of the existing teachers can be deployed on training of newly recruited teachers. Some of these can be trained and engaged in carrying out central external assessment of school children. This work would require extensive touring thus a lot many of the already employed male school-teachers can be usefully deputed on these jobs, if it is not fully outsourced to private firms. Some of these teachers can be deployed to cross-check findings of the central external assessment so as to ensure that there is no malfunctioning, e.g., there may be attempts of impersonation during the conduct of external assessment, which can be verified from the photographs of the students and further follow up action can be taken. The female teachers can also be given an option to work as teachers in their own villages/wards, albeit on the same pay as is given to their counter-parts. I have a hunch that many female teachers would be gladly ready to undergo cut in their salaries if they are given opportunity to serve in the comfort and security of their localities than availing of postings in far flung areas which create chaos in their family lives, too. Besides the advantage of nearby postings, many would also have the feeling and satisfaction of rendering a helping hand in the all-round growth of the children of their localities, too.

My submission is that no one who has been employed by the Government should be shown pink slip till there is sufficient evidence of dereliction of duty against him/her. Due to the aforesaid central external assessment, many existing

employed teachers, who are somehow continuing with pseudo attendance in their schools, will drop out themselves, thus paving the way for employment of genuine teachers who will be really interested in the uplift of the children of their localities, that, too, on significantly lower wages, till the Government finds more resources to pay them higher wages. **Further, while dealing with an issue of paramount importance, like, school education of children, which concerns universal welfare of the entire nation, other smaller issues, like, job security and hardships to a few individuals, should be relegated to the back-seat and not allowed to block the mass welfare of the people of the entire nation, moreover, now, the package of comprehensive social security would also be available for all, thus hardships of the affected individuals can also be mitigated, to a large extent.**

Therefore, right now, the immediate requirement is to fulfil the most basic need of imparting meaningful education to the students and this can be met by bringing in willing teachers, providing books & stationery, initiating central assessment of education, and rendering other essential material support wherever needed. Extra thrust in this endeavour can be provided by linking the rate of growth of learning level of school children with the grants that will be sanctioned for the development of infrastructure of those areas. For the purpose, we can also coin a slogan like the following:

***Bachhe Parrhenge, Gaon Barrhenge***

(The more the children learn, the more the villages progress.)

The estimated additional cost for strengthening school education up to upper primary classes for all the children of the country, as per the modest salary structure and other expenses as mentioned above, is computed below:

*Minimum Cost for Universal Elementary Education*

Salary for additional teachers & attendants as estimated under the preceding section	≈ Rs.300 billion
Expenses on mobile teams	≈ Rs.22 billion
Assistance for books & stationery to the children	≈ Rs.48 billion
Material cost for running schools	≈ Rs.11 billion
Total >>>	Rs.381 billion
Or	Rs.380 billion

Since, already, there exists vast infrastructure of private schools and government schools in the country; thus, there may not be much initial expenses for setting up of new schools. Therefore, now, the Government of India should make an all out effort that every child of the country is provided with quality education up to class VIII, even, if it needs cutting expenses on other decorative programmes. **In this context, it is worthwhile to quote Mahatma Gandhi, who once said, “If we wish to create a lasting peace, we must begin with the children”, similarly, I humbly submit that “If we wish to have lasting prosperity, we must invest in education of our children”.**

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