ENSURING EDUCATION FOR THE MARGINALISED STUDENTS - EDITORIALS - HINDUSTAN TIMES

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of STs, SCs, and OBCs - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

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The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on Tuesday announced that the Union government will increase its share of contribution to Post Matric Scholarship for students from the Scheduled Castes (SCs). The Centre's assistance, which was around 1,100 crore annually during 2017-18 to 2019-20, will be around 6,000 crore annually during the 2020-21 to 2025-26 period. Under the scholarship scheme, the government provides financial assistance to SC students, whose household incomes are less than 250,000 annually, for higher education. The transfer of financial assistance to the students will be now in the Direct Benefit Transfer mode, preferably using the Aadhaar Enabled Payment System.

This is a positive step to retain — and bring back — SC students in the schooling system who are often forced to drop out because their families are unable to meet schooling and related expenses, or have no choice but to join the informal sector workforce to supplement family incomes. While leaving school helps families tide over immediate economic challenges, such decisions rob students of the ability to access education, and of the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

While ensuring more funds to retain students is commendable, the Centre must also iron out the systemic challenges that are dogging post-matric scholarships. Reports indicate unfortunate and inordinate delays, backlogs and improper disbursement, a blame game between the Centre and states over processes that need to be followed, and scams, misappropriations and non-allocations as far as the scholarship funds are concerned. Translate the positive decision into sound implementation.

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