Challenges to RTE Act

Why in news?

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The Niti Aayog has called for a review of the provisions of the Right To Education Act that stipulate that children who don’t perform well cannot be held back up to class VIII.

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What RTE provisions say?

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- The Right to Education (RTE) Act, which aims to provide primary education to all children aged 6-14 years, stipulates that no child can be held back in a grade, regardless of his performance, all the way up to the eighth grade.
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- This means that a child is entitled to an eighth grade diploma even if he cannot recognise a single letter or a number if he has spent eight years in school.
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What NITI aayog points out?

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- It said the good intention behind the norm is detrimental to the learning process.
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- The Aayog pointed out that the purpose behind this provision is to minimise the drop-out rate, since demoralisation resulting from failing a class leads to children withdrawing from school altogether.
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- “But despite this good intention, the provision has a detrimental effect on learning outcomes, since it takes away the pressure to learn and to compete,” it said in its review of the 12th Five Year Plan.

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- The real problem, the Aayog said, is the quality of education as measurement by student achievements.
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- According to **Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2014**, one of the largest non-governmental household survey, the proportion of children aged 6-14 years enrolled in school in rural areas has been above 96 per cent for the past six years.
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- The ASER report finds that more than 50 per cent of the fifth graders cannot read second standard level text.
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- Even more disconcerting, the trend between 2010 and 2014 has been worsening instead of improving performance.
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What are the problems in RTE?

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- **On age criteria**, the act allows only children between the ages 6-14 to get the privileges.
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- It leaves out 0-6 years and 14-18 years despite India has signed the U.N. charter which states clearly that free education should be made compulsory to children of **0-18 years old**.
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- **On reservations**, the act talks about **25% seat reservation** in private/public unaided school for lesser privileged children.
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- The fees of these students will be borne by state government. The fee will be reimbursed at government rate.
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- There will be a wide gap between the cost of education per child and the reimbursement by the government. There comes the question of who will bear this deficit portion?
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- Moreover, what about the overhead expenses such as uniform, books, stationery, etc of attending a private school? The chances are high that the parents themselves would feel intimidated at the thought of sending their kids to private schools.
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- Further the kids will be suddenly exposed to a different living standard. Will

they be treated with dignity and equality by their peers and teachers? Will it not be traumatic for the poor kids to cope with that?
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- Lack of awareness about the Act, inability to meet the distance criteria and difficulty in obtaining necessary certificates from government authorities could be some of the reasons for the poor response from the public.
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- **On bridge courses,** the act stipulates that the child should be assigned the class according to age, which is a good step because wasted years can be saved; but no bridge course is suggested that can prepare the child to adjust to the admitted class.
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- **On Automatic passage**, every student will be passed to the next class. This can promote indolence and insincerity among children towards their studies and carelessness and laxity among the teachers.
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- The Act will create a system with no incentive for students to try to improve themselves, or to behave with a modicum of restraint. It compromises their ability to withstand pressure and compete harder in order to excel. This will create a generation of drifters who have never tasted hard work or competition.
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- **On School management Committee**, the act requires every government and aided school to form a School management Committee (SMC) which will be most comprised of parents and will be responsible for planning managing the operations of the school.
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- SMC members are required to volunteer their time and effort. This can be a burden for the poor parents. And for the aided schools, the SMC rule will lead to a breakdown of their existing management structures.
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