Ed-Sector Policy Changes

What is the issue?

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- The Union HRD Ministry has drafted two legislations recently - The “HECI Bill and the RTE (amendment) Bill”.
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- Both seem to lack quality thinking and foresight to better the ed-sector.
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What are the two bills about?

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- **HECI -** Draft bill for “Higher Education Commission of India” (HECI) for replacing “University Grants Commission” (UGC) has been released.
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- It has now been put to public consultation and received more than 10,000 suggestions/comments from various stakeholders.
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- **RTE -** Right to Education (Amendment) Bill, 2018, was passed by the Lok Sabha recently and is now before the Rajya Sabha.
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- It seeks to eliminate the no-detention policy and reintroduce testing for Classes V and VIII students to stem the degradation of education quality.
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- **Why -** A number of reports and data validate our concerns of plummeting standards in education, which triggered a need for a thorough policy shift.
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- The recent bill has been proposed in this context, but they at best seem short-sighted with little clarity.
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What are the issues with the HECI Bill?

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- National Knowledge Commission Report (2006) and the Yashpal Committee on Higher Education (2009) did recommend a new regulator to replace UGC.
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- But many concerns have been flagged by stakeholders on the HECI Bill, as it seems to want to replace UGC with a more flawed set up.
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- The proposed bill will lead to over-centralisation and enhance political interference as Union HRD ministry is envisioned as the fund disposal authority for universities.
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- Further, the Bill allows the Chairperson of the new Commission to be a member of the Central government (which was explicitly banned in UGC).
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- The bill also transgresses the autonomy of higher educational institutions by allowing micromanagement on aspects like syllabi.
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- The new over-arching body does not involve the States sufficiently and or accommodate the diverse needs of the country.
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- Therefore, instead of this half-hearted measure, the government would have been better off plugging the loopholes in the UGC.
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What is the proposed RTE (amendment) majorly premised on?

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- The Right to Education (RTE) Bill 2018 proposes to do away with the current policy that children cannot be detained till they complete Class VIII.
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- This gives States the option of holding regular examinations either at the end of Class V or Class VIII, or both, and failures can also be detained if necessary.
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- This would potentially push out many children who are unable to meet standards because of their lack of access to quality education.
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- Notably, the no-detention policy was to be implemented together with continuous assessment for identify learning deficiencies and correcting them.
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- However, as the system has failed to provide continuous assessment, there

was a constant deterioration of education quality.
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- While the policy rollback was to stem this trend, this can lead to students becoming discouraged and precipitate in higher dropout rates.
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Was No-detention policy a failure?

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- The no-detention policy is successful in the sense that it has effectively stemmed the dropout rate in enrolments to high school.
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- However, if the aim is to improve learning outcomes, then multiple other aspects of the RTE are to have been focused on.
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- Besides maintaining a good pupil-teacher ratio (PTR), proper infrastructure like all-weather buildings, barrier-free access in schools are to be ensured.
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- Further, separate toilets for boys and girls is another pertinent measure to improve qualitative standards enshrined in the RTE.
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- Also, other infrastructure aspects like libraries, playgrounds need to improve from the current dismal state of affairs.
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How is funding affecting RTE?

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- Poor funding is a major reason for the dismal implementation of RTE.
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- Further, quality-related interventions accounted for only 9% of the total approved RTE budget in 2016-17.
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- Also, funding for “Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan”, which is the main vehicle to implement RTE, has remained much below the resource estimated need.
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- Interestingly, better off states like Kerala that properly budget and spend the allocated amount, plan to continue with the no-detention policy.
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Source: The Hindu

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