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# Blame 'devastated' primary education system for lowest literacy rate in Bihar: Experts

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PATNA: A latest report of the ministry of education describing Bihar with the lowest literacy rate in the country has raised concern over the poor state of education in the state that produces good number of IAS officers and IITians every year with many of them cracking the exams with self-study only. So, what plagues the system?

Academicians, experts and officials have blamed the nearly 'devastated' primary education for the sorry state of affairs. They said the recruitment of schoolteachers on contract without caring for the talent has further aggravated the problem.

"Primary education was once in a good shape in the state, but now it has got destroyed, thanks to the introduction of contract system in teaching jobs. How can we get good teachers if the higher education remains in bad shape. If we can't get good teachers, then primary education will remain in bad shape," said Prof DM

Diwakar, former director at the AN Sinha Institute of Social Studies.

He said the government institutions are the source of education for 90% of the population, but the state government is bringing private universities.

Academician Prof NK Chaudhary said the government's focus has been on providing education to a few elite class people by way of opting for IITs and IIMs, rather than creating mass awareness for literacy. "The ruling parties have been seeking votes from the poor, but work for the elite class only," said Prof Chaudhary, who blamed the midday meal scheme for further damaging the primary education. "Similarly, the teachers with fake degrees have been recruited in schools. So, how can we improve the system?" he wondered.

"The problem lies at the primary level. Now it can't be corrected. Proper teaching in schools has not been taking place for the past 30 years, then from where can you get quality teachers?" asked Abhayanand, the former DGP, who has been imparting free coaching to the poor and talented students to help them crack IIT exams. "As the DGP, I had once asked the government to give me the responsibility to improve the education system, but they told me to better focus on policing," he revealed.

Anand Kumar of the "Super 30" fame describes poverty as one of the reasons behind the poor literacy rate. "The poor people find sources of livelihood as their biggest achievement. But they must know only education can help them fight poverty. Eat half stomach but do teach your children," Anand advised people while pleading for mass awareness programme.

When contacted, education minister Chandrashekhar said although he hasn't gone through the report yet, he would like to say the academic situation in Bihar is far better than in the BJP-ruled states. "The latest ASER (annual status of education report) says the percentage of schoolchildren knowing mathematics, English and

Hindi is very poor in Gujarat, UP, MP and Uttarakhand. Especially, the level of education in Gujarat is very alarming while Bihar is far better than these BJP-ruled states," he claimed.

Stating that the state government was quite serious towards improving the level of education in the state, the minister said the highest allocation (22%) of funds in this year's budget is for education while chief minister Nitish Kumar has announced to increase it further by 4%.

According to the latest report of the Bihar Economic Survey, dropout is a major problem and it is pervasive in all the stages of education. Reacting on this, the minister said the education department has launched many initiatives such as bag-less Saturday to motivate schoolchildren towards education and to improve enrolments in schools, the government is quite serious towards improving the level of education in the state though it will take time. "Ek din me to sab thik nahin hoga na!", he remarked.