Aspirational Districts Programme

Why in news?

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- NITI Aayog has recently launched the baseline ranking for 115 aspirational districts.
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- This is in line with the Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP) announced earlier by the Prime Minister.
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What is ADP?

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- It aims to quickly and effectively transform some of India's most underdeveloped districts.
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- It will identify areas of immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts.
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- The broad ideas of the programme include -
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i. **convergence** of central and state schemes
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ii. **collaboration** of central, state level '*Prabhari*' (in-charge) officers and district collectors
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iii. **competition** among districts
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- The states are the main drivers in the programme.

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- Deliberately, the districts have been described as aspirational rather than backward.
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- The motive is to view them as areas of opportunity and hope rather than of distress and hopelessness.
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How were the districts selected?

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- The 115 districts were chosen by senior officials of the Union government.
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- This was in consultation with State officials on the basis of a composite index.
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- The parameters included are -
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i. deprivation enumerated under Socio-Economic Caste Census
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ii. key health and education performance indicators
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iii. state of basic infrastructure
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What is the present ranking on?

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- The present ranking is based on 49 indicators across 5 sectors.
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- These sectors are areas that have been targeted for transformation -
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1. health and nutrition
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2. education

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3. agriculture and water resources
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4. financial inclusion and skill development
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5. basic infrastructure
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- A minimum of one district was chosen from every State.
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- Apparently, the largest concentration of districts is in the States which have historically under-performed.
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- This includes states such as UP and Bihar, or which are afflicted by left-wing extremism such as Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.
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- The present ranking would be followed by delta ranking of these districts based on their "incremental progress".
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How is progress monitored?

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- NITI Aayog in partnership with the government of Andhra Pradesh has created a dashboard.
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- This is for monitoring the real-time progress of the districts.
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- District collectors of all the aspirational districts can input the latest available data of their respective districts.
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- The dashboard will also be open to the public.
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What are the significant aspects of ADP?

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- **Approach** - This is the first time India’s most backward districts are being

focussed.
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- ADP is a better vision of how public services are best delivered to those who need them the most.
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- **Governance** - Achieving success in this programme necessitates the contribution of all 3 tiers of government.
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- The role of states is important in terms of facilitating resource, personnel, etc.
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- On financial inclusion, the full cooperation of banks is necessary and only the Central government has leverage over them.
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- The most crucial is the role of District Magistrate or Collector.
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- As s/he is familiar with the challenges of his or her geography and has considerable power to implement government schemes.
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- **Competitive federalism** - The spirit of cooperation needs to be supplemented by a culture of competition.
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- ADP takes the principle of competitive federalism down to district administrations.
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- **Civil society** - ADP has opened its door to civil society and leveraged the tool of corporate social responsibility.
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- This will bring new ideas and fresh energy from non-government institutions, to join the “official” efforts.
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- **Efficiency** - Many schemes of the Centre have flexible spending components, permitting autonomy at local level.
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- But these are seldom used in practice due to controlling Central and State machineries.
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- Thus ADP focusses on not spending more but spending better.
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- There is no financial package or large allocation of funds in ADP.
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- It only aims at leveraging the already existing resources of several

government programmes, to use them more efficiently.
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- **Smart data** - Data collection is often delayed or lacking in quality in India, distorting the development policy efforts.
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- With real time data in ADP, those on the ground level can alter strategies after accurate feedback.
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- In a way, the ADP reorients how government does its business of delivering development.
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Source: The Hindu, Economic Times

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Quick Fact

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Prabhari Officer

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- Each district has a prabhari (in-charge) officer -
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1. assigned from the Centre (of additional secretary or joint secretary rank)
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2. assigned from the State (of the rank of Secretary to State government)
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- A prabhari officer will work in cooperation with the district administration.
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