Draft National Education Policy 2019 - Language Controversy

What is the issue?

- Following the submission of the draft National Education Policy 2019, there were protests against the three language formula.
- The controversial provision was thus revised by Dr. Kasturirangan-led committee that submitted it.

What are the old and new proposals?

- **Earlier provision** - Students who wish to change one of the three languages they are studying may do so in Grade 6.
- But this is only as long as the study of 3 languages by students in the Hindi-speaking states would continue to include Hindi and English and one of the modern Indian languages from other parts of India.
- Likewise, study of languages by students in the non-Hindi-speaking states would include the regional language, Hindi and English.
- **New change** - Students who wish to change one or more of the 3 languages they are studying may do so in Grade 6 or Grade 7.
- This is only as long as they are able to still demonstrate proficiency in three languages (one language at the literature level).
- This will be as per their modular Board Examinations held some time during secondary school.

What is the continuing contention?

- As per the earlier version, the committee stipulated the languages that students must choose to study from Grade 6.
- In the revised draft, the committee has merely omitted the references to the language that students may choose.
- However, the broader recommendation regarding the implementation of a three-language formula remains.
- In other words, the revised draft retains the recommendation to introduce a three-language formula from Class 1 onwards.
- It simply removes the clause stipulating the specific languages that students must choose in Grade 6.
- Also, the revision was not done by the Central government but by the

committee that drafted the policy.

Is Centre's rationale justified?

- The draft policy's push for Hindi seems to be based on the premise that 54% of Indians speak Hindi.
- But according to the 2001 Census, 52 crore out of 121 crore people identified Hindi as their language.
- About 32 crore people declared Hindi as their mother tongue.
- This means that Hindi is the language of less than 44% Indians and mother tongue of only little over 25% people in India.
- But there has been greater push for making Hindi a pan-India language, which is seen as imposition of Hindi by many states, especially that of the South.

How has the official position of Hindi evolved?

- **Constituent Assembly** - The debate over Hindi has been raging since Independence.
- The Constituent Assembly witnessed heated exchanges over the use and scope of Hindi.
- The Sub-Committee on Fundamental Rights of the Constituent Assembly recommended the following:
    1. Hindustani, written either in Devanagari or the Persian script at the option of the citizen, shall, as the national language, be the first official language of the Union.
    2. English shall be the second official language for such period as the Union may, by law, determine.

- **Constitution** - Article 343 of the Constitution prescribes Hindi as written in Devanagari script as the official language of the government along with English for 15 years initially [It has however been extended subsequently].
- Clearly, the Constitution did not declare Hindi as the 'national language'.
- It rather accorded Hindi the status of 'official language' along with English.

What is the way forward?

- Language is primarily a utilitarian tool.
- While acquisition of additional tools can indeed be beneficial, compulsory learning should be limited to one’s mother tongue.
- Besides, English, as the language that provides access to global knowledge and as a link language within India, could be a supportive language.
- Given this, not everyone is satisfied by the changes, and the three-language formula itself is seen as an unnecessary imposition.

Source: The Hindu, India Today

