National Education Policy, 2020

Mains: *GS Paper II | Governance*

Why in News?

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) issued revised guidelines recently to address widespread protests from parents and schools.

What is National Education Policy, 2020?

- It is a framework designed to renovate India's education system, replacing the old 1986 policy.

Key Changes

- It replaces the old 10+2 school system with a more responsive 5+3+3+4 pedagogical framework, expanding universal schooling access to ***ages 3 to 18 (up from ages 6 to 14).***
- **Foundational Stage (5 Years) -** Includes 3 years of preschool/Anganwadi and Grades 1 and 2 (Ages 3–8).
- Focuses entirely on play-based learning and achieving absolute foundational literacy and numeracy by Grade 3.
- **Preparatory Stage (3 Years) -** Grades 3 to 5 (Ages 8–11).
- It shifts toward interactive classroom learning, introducing basic textbooks across subjects.
- **Middle Stage (3 Years) -** Grades 6 to 8 (Ages 11–14).
- It introduces experimental sciences, mathematics, arts, and humanities alongside vocational training and coding from Grade 6.
- **Secondary Stage (4 Years) -** Grades 9 to 12 (Ages 14–18).
- It offers greater subject flexibility with no hard walls separating arts and sciences, or curricular and extracurricular streams.
- **Language -** The policy strongly recommends teaching in the mother tongue or regional language at least until Grade 5.
- **Assessment -** Traditional report cards are being replaced by a holistic ***360-degree assessment matrix*** that includes self, peer, and teacher evaluations.
- **Higher Education -** The policy aims to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education to 50% by 2035, introducing structural flexibility to eliminate strict academic silos.
    - **Holistic Undergraduate Degrees -** Undergraduate degrees will be 3 or 4 years long with a multiple entry and exit system.

- *Exit after 1 year* - Certificate awarded.
- *Exit after 2 years* - Advanced Diploma awarded.
- *Exit after 3 years* - Bachelor's Degree awarded.
- *Exit after 4 years* - Bachelor's with Research awarded.

What has Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) relaxed?

- **Continuation of Foreign Languages-** Students currently in Classes 7, 8, and 9 who have already taken 2 non-native/foreign languages can continue with them.
- They only need to add *one* native Indian language *(Bhartiya Bhasha)* as their third language (R3).
- **No Board Exams for R3 -** For these specific batches, the newly added third language will be evaluated purely through internal school-based assessments.
- There will be no external CBSE Board examination for this third language when they reach Class 10.
- **Complete Class 10 Exemption -** The active Class 10 batch is ***entirely exempt*** from the new policy and will continue with the old two-language system.
- **Special Exemptions -** Complete exemptions from the compulsory native Indian language requirement are granted to Children with Special Needs (CwSN), schools located outside India, and foreign students returning to India.

What is the Three-Language formula?

- It was formerly proposed in 1968 and reiterated by NEP 2020, the Three-Language Formula is an educational strategy designed to bridge regional language gaps.

- **Key changes –**
  - The current batch of class X will not have to follow the new language policy.
  - For the current batches studying in class VII, VIII and IX would not be required to give board examination in third language when they progress to Class X.
  - For the current batches of class VII, VIII, IX who had already taken 2 foreign languages would continue with the same with one additional native Indian Language (Bhartiya Bhasha).
  - The grade appropriate resource material would be made available in a time bound manner.
  - Language learning will be meaningful, engaging and enriching to contribute holistic development.

What is the significance of the revised guidelines?

- **Prevents Academic Burnout -** It protects students from the mental stress of changing their curriculum mid-way through the academic year.
- **Promotes Pragmatic Implementation -** It shifts the focus from rigid compliance to a phased transition, giving schools time to prepare.
- **Equity in Assessment-** By keeping the third language internally assessed for transitional batches, it ensures students aren't penalized with low board exam scores in a language they just started learning.

What are the Constitutional and Legal dimensions?

- **The 8th Schedule -** Recognizes 22 official languages of India, which form the pool for *Bhartiya Bhasha* choices.
- **Article 29 -** Guarantees minorities the *right to conserve their distinct language, script, or culture.*
- **Article 343 & 351 -** Article 343 establishes Hindi in Devanagari script as the official language of the Union.
- Article 351 directs the State to promote the spread and development of the Hindi language to serve as a medium of expression.
- **The Concurrent List -** Education was moved from the State List to the Concurrent List via the 42nd Amendment Act of 1976.
- This gives both the Central and State governments legislative powers, though Central boards like CBSE align with Union policies like the NEP.
- **The RPwD Act, 2016 -** The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act mandates accommodations in examinations, validating CBSE's exemption for special needs students.

What are the challenges ahead?

- **Severe Teacher Deficit -** Finding qualified instructors for 22 scheduled Indian languages, especially non-Hindi languages in northern states or vice-versa presents a major logistical challenge.
- **Resource Constraints-** Developing, printing, and distributing grade-appropriate textbooks mid-session causes immense pressure on school infrastructure.
- **Regional Political Friction-** States like Tamil Nadu historically adhere to a strict two-language formula (English and Tamil) and resist the three-language mandate, viewing it as a vehicle for language imposition.

What are the initiatives taken by the Government?

- **Digital Resource Provisioning -** NCERT is making dedicated R3 (Third Language) textbooks across all 22 Scheduled Indian languages freely available online via its official portals.
- **Flexible Staffing Schemes -** CBSE has authorized schools to hire retired teachers, qualified postgraduates, or tap into *Sahodaya clusters* (inter-school sharing models) and virtual/hybrid classrooms to solve the teacher shortage.
- **Technology Integration -** Deploying e-learning portals like DIKSHA to provide contextualized regional language learning modules.

Ethical Dimensions

- *Reversing the mid-year ban protects mental well-being, though adding a third language increases workload.*
- *Current 7th–9th graders get easy internal grading; incoming 6th graders face tough, mandatory board exams.*
- *Elite schools offer foreign languages for global mobility; poorer schools lack the resources, widening inequality.*
- *State-mandated cultural rootedness clashes with an individual's freedom to*

choose global career skills.
- *The quick policy flip-flop shows poor initial planning but a positive willingness to fix bureaucratic mistakes.*

What is the way forward?

- For the policy to succeed without disrupting student life, future rollouts must prioritize flexibility over enforcement:
- **Longer Lead Times -** Changes to language policy should strictly apply to incoming Class 6 batches (as CBSE has now directed), ensuring a natural 5-year pipeline to Class 10 rather than retroactively altering senior schedules.
- **Standardized Teacher Training -** The government must invest heavily in Language Teacher Training programs to build a sustainable pipeline of multilingual educators.
- **Focus on Functional Fluency -** Language learning should be treated as a tool for joyful communication and cultural empathy rather than a high-stakes, rote-memorization exam hurdle.

Reference

The Hindu | CBSE relaxes three-language policy

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