Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan

Why in news?

\n\n

The budget for Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan is increased 4 times, and the second phase of the scheme is also approved.

\n\n

What is RUSA?

\n\n

\n
- Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme launched in 2013.
\n
- Its aim was to increase enrolment in higher education by 30%.
\n
- It primarily provides strategic funding to eligible State higher educational institutions.
\n

\n\n

What was the need?

\n\n

\n
- India is estimated to have over 800 universities, with over 40,000 colleges affiliated to them.
\n
- The Centre's slant toward premier institutions has continued ever since the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-12).
\n
- **Central Fund** - Presently, less than 6% of students study in about 150 Centrally-funded institutions.
\n
- But they corner almost the entire funding by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD).
\n

- The funding is mainly directed towards starting more IITs, IIMs and Central universities.
\n
- **State Institutions** - About 94% of students of higher education study in 369 State universities.
\n
- In spite of a nine-fold increase in Budget allocation, State institutions have been left to fend for themselves.
\n
- To make things worse, investment by State governments has been dwindling each year as higher education is a low-priority area.
\n
- The University Grant Commission's system of direct releases to State institutions, bypassing State governments, also leads to their sense of alienation.
\n
- Thus, despite being the face of higher education in India, State institutions do not get their due share.
\n
- It was to address these critical concerns that the MHRD launched RUSA.
\n

\n\n

How does it work?

\n\n

\n
- The RUSA, unlike other schemes, is not imposed on State governments in a one-size-fits all manner.
\n
- Under RUSA, **states and institutions** have to give an undertaking expressing their **willingness** to the idea of reform.
\n
- They should also agree to meet the States' **share of the cost**.
\n
- Accordingly, preparatory grants will be released to States to have the required systems, processes, and the technical support in place.
\n
- The scheme is largely based on the **conditional release of funds**.
\n
- It is **linked to reforms** in the key areas of governance, learning-teaching outcomes, reaching out to the unreached and infrastructure support.
\n

\n\n

What are the governance reforms central to the scheme?

\n\n

\n
- **Plans -** State Higher Education Councils (SHECs) which have eminent academics, industrialists and other experts have been created.
\n
- They play a major role, from an academic and professional point of view.
\n
- They formulate the medium- and long-term State perspective plans.
\n
- **Appointment** - State has to give its commitment to creating a search-cum-select committee.
\n
- This is to avoid arbitrariness in the selection of vice-chancellors.
\n
- **Affiliation** - Mitigating the bane of the affiliation system is also a major objective.
\n
- This is achieved through a reduction in the number of colleges affiliated per university.
\n
- This is done by creating cluster universities and promoting autonomous colleges.
\n
- **Faculty** - An important precondition is the filling up of faculty positions and lifting the ban on recruitment (as in some States).
\n
- **Other** efforts to improve learning-teaching outcomes include:
\n

\n\n

\n
i. improving pedagogy by capacity-building of faculty
\n
ii. selecting teachers in a transparent manner
\n
iii. adopting accreditation as a mandatory quality-assurance framework
\n
iv. implementing semester system
\n
v. involving academics of repute and distinction in decision-making processes
\n

\n\n

How has the progress been?

\n\n

\n
- Despite being voluntary, all States except a Union Territory (Lakshadweep) are a part of RUSA.
\n
- Over the years, the RUSA's resource allocation has increased.
\n
- The funding linked to reforms has had a visible impact on higher education.
\n
- There is improvement in gross enrolment ratio (GER), addressing faculty vacancies, teacher-student ratio, etc.
\n
- There has also been an improvement in the number of institutions accredited and their scores.
\n

\n\n

What is the recent decision?

\n\n

\n
- The Union Cabinet has recently decided to continue with the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA).
\n
- For the current year, Rs. 1,300 crore has been provided and funding is conditional to performance.
\n
- It is hence critical to have a robust monitoring and evaluation system in place.
\n
- In this regard, certain effective tools are in function since 2015, including:
\n

\n\n

\n
i. geo-tagging
\n
ii. introduction of a public financial management system
\n
iii. a fund tracker and reform tracker system
\n

iv. regular video conferences
\n

\n\n

\n

- Given the significance of RUSA in higher education, its further success lie in the impartial administration of the scheme by MHRD.
\n
- The degree to which State governments allow the SHEC to function is also important.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n

