Shutting Down of Government School

Mains: *GS II – Education*

Why in News?

Recently, NITI Aayog report revealed that, nearly 94,000 government schools have been closed during this period, averaging 25 school closures every day.

What is the issue?

- **Government schools closure** – Nearly 94,000 government schools have been closed in India over the past decade.
- **Decline in enrolments** – According to this has contributed to a **decline of 2.26 crore students** in government school enrolment.
- Consequently, the share of government schools in total enrolment has fallen from **71% in 2005 to 49.24% in 2024-25**.
- **School Rationalisation–** The principal reason for the closure of government schools across States is **school rationalisation**.
- The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** advocates rationalisation of schools while ensuring that the concept of **neighbourhood schools** is not compromised.
- **National Data –** Government data presented in the **Lok Sabha** in February confirms the nationwide trend.
- According to **UDISE+** data:
- Government schools declined from **11.07 lakh in 2014-15** to **10.17 lakh in 2023-24**, a reduction of approximately **89,000 schools**, closely matching the **94,000** figure reported by NITI Aayog.
- During the same period, the number of **private schools increased** from **2.88 lakh to 3.31 lakh**.

Which states are most affected by school closures?

- **Madhya Pradesh –** In **December 2025**, the School Education Department of Madhya Pradesh found that **7.37 lakh children** had no school records and were not enrolled in either government or private schools.
- In districts such as **Jhabua and Shivpuri**, around **29,000 children** were placed in the **"Drop Box" category**, referring to children at imminent risk of dropping out.
- Across all **55 districts**, more than **3,500 government schools** recorded **zero new admissions**, while another **6,500 schools** admitted fewer than **10 students** during the academic session.
- In response, district education officers were instructed to display lists of unmapped

children on school notice boards, contact families directly, and upload their details to the State portal.

- The scale of the problem extends further:
  - **11.38 lakh children** fall under the "Drop Box" category.
  - **1.23 lakh children** are already recorded as dropouts.
  - **1.55 lakh children** have discontinued schooling because of displacement or migration of their families for work.
- The State had introduced flagship programmes such as **School Chalen Hum** and the **Home Contact Campaign** to prevent such outcomes.
- However, the State's own audit revealed that these programmes had failed to reach nearly **three-fourths of a million children**.
- **Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh –** The decline has been particularly steep in certain States.
- **Madhya Pradesh** witnessed a fall in government schools from **1.22 lakh in 2018–19** to **99,411** in the following year, representing a reduction of approximately **22,600 schools** within a single year.
- **Uttar Pradesh** recorded a decline from **1.63 lakh** to **1.38 lakh government schools** during the same period, amounting to a reduction of over **25,000 schools**.
- **Jammu and Kashmir –** Jammu and Kashmir also experienced extensive school rationalisation.
- Reports indicate that children are now required to travel **4–6 kilometres daily** to reach functioning schools, contrary to the **neighbourhood school** mandate under the Right to Education Act.
- More than **4,300 schools** were either closed or merged under the rationalisation programme.
- UDISE+ figures show that the number of schools in the Union Territory declined from **23,167 in 2020–21** to **18,785 in 2022–23**.
- At the same time, nearly **13,000 teaching posts** remained vacant, as reported in the State Assembly.

What are the impact of government school closures?

- **Impacts on disadvantaged communities** – Government school closures have significant implications because government schools primarily serve India's most disadvantaged communities.
- Government schools are disproportionately attended by children belonging to:
  - **Scheduled Castes (SCs),**
  - **Scheduled Tribes (STs), and**
  - **Poorer sections of Other Backward Classes (OBCs).**
- India is home to approximately **60% of the world's below-poverty-line population**, and the children from these households constitute the majority of government school students.
- Therefore, closure of government schools directly affects those who are already economically and socially vulnerable.
- **Unequal Impact on Marginalised Communities –** A **2019 National Sample Survey** analysis found that access to free education has declined unevenly.
- The survey observed that **Muslim, Scheduled Caste, and Scheduled Tribe**

households have become disproportionately marginalised from schools located nearest to them.

- As neighbourhood schools disappear, these communities face greater barriers in accessing education, increasing the risk of exclusion.
- **Greater Burden on Girls –** The burden of school consolidation falls disproportionately on **girls**.
- When schools become more distant due to closures, girls are often the first to be withdrawn from education.
- Thus, rationalisation not only affects access but also has important gender implications by increasing the likelihood of girls discontinuing their education.
- **Challenges in Teaching and Learning –** School consolidation has also affected the quality of education.
- In many cases, a **single teacher** is required to teach **five different classes simultaneously**.
- Such an arrangement prevents teachers from understanding individual children's backgrounds or tailoring instruction according to their needs.
- This situation is also technically inconsistent with the staffing and quality norms prescribed under the **Right to Education Act**.
- **Responsibility for the Trend –** The issue of responsibility has become a matter of debate.
- In the **Lok Sabha**, the concerned Minister stated that education is a subject on the **Concurrent List**, and responsibility for school closures rests with the States.
- However, the **Right to Education Act** is a **Central legislation**, and the legal mandate regarding neighbourhood schools is the responsibility of the Union Government.
- Furthermore, the Centre actively influences school education by, making the allocation of Central funds conditional upon implementation of the **National Education Policy**, and imposing a language policy.
- Therefore, there remain avenues through which the Centre can intervene to address the growing trend of government school closures.

What are the limitations of the Right to Education Act?

- **No binding provisions** – While it guarantees access to education, it contains **no binding provisions regarding the quality of education** delivered inside classrooms.
- **Unenforceable legal entitlements** – The Act creates legal entitlements that children themselves cannot effectively enforce.
- Poor and rural parents often lack the legal knowledge, institutional support, and resources needed to secure these rights.
- **Inequality** – The Act assumes an equality of power between the State, schools, and families that does not exist in reality.
- Consequently, the RTE has proved **non-justiciable in practice**.
- **Inactive functions** – **School Management Committees (SMCs)**, which were intended to provide parents and communities with a formal mechanism to participate in school governance, have largely remained inactive and are often not convened.

***The Right to Education (RTE) Act**, implemented in 2010, guarantees free and compulsory education for children between 6 and 14 years of age.*

What lies ahead?

- The closure of **government schools** over the past decade represents a major challenge for India's school education system.
- While school rationalisation is justified as an administrative measure under the National Education Policy 2020, its implementation has raised concerns regarding neighbourhood schools, educational access, and equity.
- The impact has fallen disproportionately on poor, rural, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Muslim communities, and girls, while States such as Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir have witnessed some of the most significant closures.
- The debate over responsibility between the Centre and the States, together with the practical limitations of the Right to Education Act, highlights the need to ensure that administrative rationalisation does not undermine the constitutional promise of free and accessible education for every child.

Reference

The Hindu| Govt. School Closures

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