Time to Scrap Pilgrimage Subsidy

Why in news?

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Punjab has decided to scrap its Mukh Mantri Tirath Darshan Yatra Scheme which subsidised pilgrims' travels and channel the earmarked amounts towards education.

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Tirath Darshan Yatra Scheme:

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- Under the scheme, the previous Siromani Akali Dal(SAD)-BJP government in Punjab had spent 139 crore funding some 8,000 bus trips, including 6,481 trips to the famous Golden Temple in Amritsar, a place of pilgrimage for Sikhs, as well as over 100 train journeys to Nanded Sahib, Varanasi and Ajmer.
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Do other sectors enjoy the same amount of patronage?

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- Former chief minister Parkash Singh Badal’s pet project was intended to reap electoral dividends, as populist schemes sometimes do, even as educational institutions in the state were starved for funds—while Sainik School, Kapurthala had not received any government grants for the past 10 years.
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- The Tribune reports, Baba University of Medical Science and Health Care needed Rs40 crore to overcome an acute shortage of funds and even the famous Panjab University had sought funds but hadn’t received any.
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- **Given how promoting education results in perceptible benefits for**

human capital development, this rethink by the Punjab government is indeed welcome.
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Religious Extravaganza:

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- The Centre currently allocates some Rs600-700 crore annually for its Haj subsidy programme while the external affairs ministry spends and additional Rs30-odd crore.
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- Though efforts have been mounted to end this subsidy by 2022, the **religious extravaganza of the Kumbhs receives support from both the Centre and state governments.**
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- These are done at the time when the need to fund institutions to deliver high-quality education is so badly felt across the country.
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- The Uttar Pradesh government gives a Rs1lakh subsidy for the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra.
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- Given the sheer number of people congregating for the Kumbhs, it is necessary that governments get involved to make sure that safety and security are taken care of as well as public health risks are mitigated.
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- But that is where the involvement needs to stop.
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Source: Financial Express

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