Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)

Why in news?

Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry has decided to participate in Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) after a gap of 10 years.

What is the origin and purpose of PISA?

- PISA was first administered in 2000.
- It is an international Survey conducted every three years (triennial).
- It is coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).
- It assesses the quality of education systems across the world by evaluating students in science, mathematics and reading.
- It is a 2-hour computer-based test that focuses on 15-year-old students.
- This particular age group is selected as they have either completed or are near the end of their compulsory education in most countries.
- PISA requires the examinees to have finished at least six years of formal schooling.
- About 5.5 lakh students in 72 countries, which together make up nine-tenths of the world economy, took the test in 2015.

How does the program evaluate students?
- PISA is a competency-based test designed to assess the ability of the candidates to apply their knowledge to real-life situations.
- It does not test a student’s memory and curriculum-based knowledge.
- PISA’s science test, , measures three competencies —

1. Ability to explain scientific phenomena
2. Scientific interpretation of data and evidence
3. Ability to design and evaluate scientific query.

Similarly, PISA defines reading as an individual’s capacity to understand, use and reflect on written information in a range of situations.

What is the criticism about the test?

- Academicians have expressed concerns over the impact of PISA rankings.
- Detractors feel PISA has contributed to an obsession with standardized testing relying heavily on quantitative measures.
- America’s ‘Race to the Top’ program is often cited as an example in this context as it uses standardized testing for evaluating students, teachers and administrators.
- The triennial survey has also been criticized for shifting focus from long-term and enduring solutions to temporary measures.
- Ad-hoc measures are being increasingly adopted by countries to improve their ranking.
- OECD responded that there is no evidence to suggest PISA or any other
educational comparison has caused a shift to short-term fixes.

- In fact, according to OECD, it has created opportunities for policy-makers and stakeholders to collaborate across borders.

Why was India out of it for 10 years?

- The country participated in 2009 test with 16,000 students from 400 schools in Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.
- India was placed 72nd among the 74 participating countries.
- The then UPA government blamed “out of context” questions for the poor show.
- Also it chose not to participate in the 2012 and 2015 cycles.
- Till date, India has participated only once in PISA-2009.

What is the recent development?

- Under the NDA government, the HRD Ministry first revisited this decision in 2016.
- The Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan set up a committee to review the matter and its report recommended that the country participate in the 2018 test cycle.
- A similar recommendation was made in 2017 by the group of secretaries on education constituted by Prime Minister.
- Recently, HRD Minister formally approved the decision to participate in the 2021 cycle of PISA.
- The government will request OECD to administer the test across all schools in Chandigarh in 2021.
Chandigarh was selected for three reasons.

1. Compact area.
2. To keep number of languages in which the test has to be administered to a minimum and
3. Chandigarh’s record of performing well in learning assessments.

Source: The Indian Express