Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan

Why in news?

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

What is RUSA?

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

What was the need?

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

**State Institutions** - About 94% of students of higher education study in 369 State universities.

In spite of a nine-fold increase in Budget allocation, State institutions have been left to fend for themselves.

To make things worse, investment by State governments has been dwindling each year as higher education is a low-priority area.

The University Grant Commission’s system of direct releases to State institutions, bypassing State governments, also leads to their sense of alienation.

Thus, despite being the face of higher education in India, State institutions do not get their due share.

It was to address these critical concerns that the MHRD launched RUSA.

**How does it work?**

The RUSA, unlike other schemes, is not imposed on State governments in a one-size-fits-all manner.

Under RUSA, states and institutions have to give an undertaking expressing their willingness to the idea of reform.

They should also agree to meet the States’ share of the cost.

Accordingly, preparatory grants will be released to States to have the required systems, processes, and the technical support in place.

The scheme is largely based on the conditional release of funds.

It is linked to reforms in the key areas of governance, learning-teaching outcomes, reaching out to the unreached and infrastructure support.
What are the governance reforms central to the scheme?

- **Plans** - State Higher Education Councils (SHECs) which have eminent academics, industrialists and other experts have been created.

- They play a major role, from an academic and professional point of view.

- They formulate the medium- and long-term State perspective plans.

- **Appointment** - State has to give its commitment to creating a search-cum-select committee.

- This is to avoid arbitrariness in the selection of vice-chancellors.

- **Affiliation** - Mitigating the bane of the affiliation system is also a major objective.

- This is achieved through a reduction in the number of colleges affiliated per university.

- This is done by creating cluster universities and promoting autonomous colleges.

- **Faculty** - An important precondition is the filling up of faculty positions and lifting the ban on recruitment (as in some States).

- **Other** efforts to improve learning-teaching outcomes include:

  i. improving pedagogy by capacity-building of faculty

  ii. selecting teachers in a transparent manner

  iii. adopting accreditation as a mandatory quality-assurance framework

  iv. implementing semester system

  v. involving academics of repute and distinction in decision-making processes
How has the progress been?

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

What is the recent decision?

- The Union Cabinet has recently decided to continue with the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA).
- For the current year, Rs. 1,300 crore has been provided and funding is conditional to performance.
- It is hence critical to have a robust monitoring and evaluation system in place.
- In this regard, certain effective tools are in function since 2015, including:
  
  i. geo-tagging
  
  ii. introduction of a public financial management system
  
  iii. a fund tracker and reform tracker system
iv. regular video conferences

Given the significance of RUSA in higher education, its further success lie in the impartial administration of the scheme by MHRD.

The degree to which State governments allow the SHEC to function is also important.

Source: The Hindu