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.

\n
**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