NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (NEP), 2020 - GOVERNANCE PRELIMS AND GS II MAINS

Q. What are the massive changes proposed by the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 in India's schools and higher education sector? Does it comprehend the learning outcome in line with the changing times? Examine (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *Opinion: The scope and challenges of National Education Policy*

What's in the news?
- The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) was introduced by the Union government to improve the education system in the country.

Key takeaways:
- It proposes massive changes in India's schools and higher education sector so as our system and practices are at par with global education standards.

NEP - Backdrop:
- An NEP is a comprehensive framework to guide the development of education in the country.
- The Third NEP proposes sweeping changes including **opening up of Indian higher education to foreign universities, dismantling of the UGC and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), introduction of a four-year multidisciplinary undergraduate programme with multiple exit options, and discontinuation of the M Phil programme.**

School Education:
- **Universalization of education by 2030 through 100% GER (Gross Enrollment Ratio) from pre-primary to secondary.**
- **Open schooling system** (no admission requirements like NIOS) for out-of-school children.
- The policy focuses on overhauling the curriculum.
  - Making "easier" Board exams.
  - Reduction in the syllabus to retain "core essentials".
  - Thrust on "experiential learning and critical thinking".
  - **"5+3+3+4" design** corresponds to the age groups 3-8 years (foundational stage), 8-11 (preparatory), 11-14 (middle), and 14-18 (secondary).
- **Bringing early childhood education** (also known as pre-school education for children of ages 3 to 5) under the ambit of formal schooling.
- **The mid-day meal programme will be extended to pre-school children**.
- The NEP says students until Class 5 should be taught in their **mother tongue** or regional language.

- NCERT will develop a National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE) for children up to the age of 8.
- NEP 2020 calls for the setting up of a **National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy** by the Ministry of Education.

Higher Education:

- Proposes phasing out of all institutions offering single streams and that all universities and colleges must aim to become **multidisciplinary by 2040.**
- **Doubling the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education by 2035 (50% by 2035).**
- Broad-based, multi-disciplinary, holistic UG (Undergraduate) education with provisions of a flexible curriculum, integration of vocational education, multiple entries and exit points with respective degrees, and also undergraduate programs in regional languages.
- **Academic bank of credits** to enable transfers of credits between institutions
- **HECI (Higher education commission of India)** as an umbrella regulator except for legal and medical education.
- Promotion of multilingualism in schools and colleges.
- **Regulatory body NEAT (National Educational Alliance for Technology) has been set up to integrate technology for better learning outcomes.**

Opportunities Offered by NEP:

1. Develops Skilling:

- Introduction of vocational courses with an internship nudges the vulnerable sections of society to send their children to school.

2. Universalisation of Education:

- NEP proposes the extension of the Right to Education (RTE) to all children up to the age of 18. Policy aims to achieve 100% youth and adult literacy.

3. Inclusive Education:

- **Setting up of Gender Inclusion Fund and also Special Education Zones for disadvantaged regions and groups.**
- Children with disabilities will be enabled to fully participate in the regular schooling process from the foundational stage to higher education.
- Efforts will be made to incentivize the merit of students belonging to SC, ST, OBC, and other SEDGs.
- Every state/district will be encouraged to establish "Bal Bhavans" as a special daytime boarding school, to participate in art-related, career-related, and play-related activities.

4. Transparency:

- In spite of periodic inspection, transparency, maintaining quality standards and a favourable public perception will become a 24X7 pursuit for the institutions, leading to all-round improvement in their standard.
- **PARAKH** (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development), a national assessment centre has been proposed to be set up to keep a regular check on the education system.
- Establishes a super-regulator for education which will be responsible for standards-setting, funding, accreditation and regulation of higher education India.

5. Foreign Universities:
- Allows universities from among the top 100 in the world to be able to set up campuses in India.
- This will lead to an infusion of international perspective and innovation, which will make the Indian education system more efficient and competitive.

6. Mother Tongue:
- Making mother tongue, local language or the regional language as the **medium of instruction at least till Grade 5**, considered as the best medium of teaching.

Challenges faced by NEP:
1. Learning Gap:
- Currently, India is grappling with **huge learning gaps**. This is because the needs of children are more personalized and cannot be addressed only through online mode.

2. Digital Gap:
- The **digital divide** is also causing the education divide in India.
- Today, in India, over 90 percent of students do not have devices that allow them to access online learning holistically.

3. Gap in Autonomy:
- When the **government is calling for greater autonomy**, several universities continue to function without full-time heads and vice-chancellors.
- For instance, 10 central universities, including Delhi University and JNU, remain without full-time heads.

4. Financial Gap:
- The NEP asks for the highest priority to literacy and numeracy, but the government has slashed the school education budget by almost Rs 5,000 crore; higher education has suffered a Rs 1,000 crore cut.

5. Skill Gap:

- NEP failed to voice out for the **persistent mismatch between the knowledge & skills imparted and the jobs available.**
- NEP also remains silent on education related to **emerging technological fields** like artificial intelligence, cyberspace, nanotech, etc.

Way forward:

1. Institional Development:

- For the NEP to move forward, India needs a robust institutional mechanism and large-scale capacity building to create enthusiasm among stakeholders. Every stakeholder at the state, district, sub-district, block-level has to have ownership and understand the concepts of NEP.

2. Local Preference:

- Directorates of education have to be strengthened in order to ensure that the policy permeates to the district and zonal level educational clusters.

3. Infrastructural Development:

- To help children to realize their full potential, India requires effective strategies to physically equip teachers and students with better tools in the classroom, increase access to laptops and other gadgets, install interactive whiteboards and provide fast and reliable internet access.

4. Innovative Approach:

- The state and national boards across the nation will have to start with pilot programs. The creation of master trainers should be done, and they have to train principals and teachers in urban and rural areas.
- Providing the necessary financial resources such as
  - A special purpose vehicle (SPV) needs to be created to ensure NEP funds are available and that the implementation process is not delayed.

5. Other Takeaways:

- India also needs to promote private philanthropy for funding both public and private higher education institutions.
- New and additional forms of tax incentives and other forms of incentives need to be evolved.
- To emphasize vocational training, but to make it effective, there has to be close coordination between the education, skills and labour ministry.