



## Current Affairs of the Day

### PAPER 2:

#### ➤ International Relations:

1. Turkey approves new social media law
2. Indians the biggest group getting Australia citizenship

#### ➤ Education:

1. New National Education Policy 2020
2. Easier exams, no cramming

#### ➤ Health:

1. Tocilizumab fails to treat pneumonia

### PAPER 3:

#### ➤ Economy:

1. High prices of pulses may affect nutrition security: study



## 4-year UG courses in, M.Phil. out in new education policy

### New National Education Policy 2020:

- The new National Education Policy approved by the Union Cabinet on Wednesday will introduce four-year undergraduate degrees with multiple entry and exit options, abolish the M.Phil. degree, and establish a common higher education regulator with fee fixation for both private and public institutions.
- It also envisions universalisation of early childhood education from ages 3 to 6 by 2030, a new school curriculum with coding and vocational studies from Class 6, and a child's mother tongue being used as the medium of instruction till Class 5.
- This is the first new education policy in 34 years.
- A panel headed by former ISRO chief K. Kasturirangan submitted a draft in December 2018, which was made public and opened for feedback after the Lok Sabha election in May 2019.

### Language issues:

- Language issues caused the most outrage at that time, as the original draft called for mandatory teaching of Hindi to all school students. That clause was dropped and the final policy document makes it clear that "there will be a greater flexibility in the three-language formula, and no language will be imposed on any State. The three languages learned by children will be the choices of States, regions, and of course the students themselves, so long as at least two of the three languages are native to India.

### Learning plan

A look at the key features of the new education policy:

■ R.V.S. PRASAD



- Public spending on education by States, Centre to be raised to 6% of GDP
- Ministry of Human Resource Development to be renamed Ministry of Education
- Separate technology unit to develop digital education resources



### SCHOOL EDUCATION

- Universalisation from age 3 to Class 10 by 2030
- Mission to ensure literacy and numeracy skills by 2025
- Mother tongue as medium of instruction till Class 5 wherever possible
- New curriculum to include 21st century skills like coding and vocational integration from Class 6
- Board exams to be easier, redesigned



### HIGHER EDUCATION

- New umbrella regulator for all higher education except medical, legal courses
- Flexible, holistic, multi-disciplinary UG degrees of 3-4 years' duration
- 1 to 2 year PG programmes, no M.Phil
- College affiliation system to be phased out in 15 years



- Sanskrit will be offered as an option at all levels of school and higher education,” said the policy, adding that other classical languages will also be available, possibly as online modules, while foreign languages will be offered at the secondary level.
- “Wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/ mother tongue/ local language/ regional language ... This will be followed by both public and private schools,” said the policy.
- As education was a concurrent subject, with most States having their own school boards, State governments would have to be brought on board for actual implementation of this decision.
- A new curricular framework is to be introduced, including the pre-school and anganwadi years. A **National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy** will ensure basic skills at the Class 3 level by 2025. Students will begin classes on coding as well as vocational activities from Class 6 onwards. Indian knowledge systems, including tribal and indigenous knowledge, will be incorporated into the curriculum in an accurate and scientific manner, said the policy.

### Equitable use of technology:

- The National Education Policy (NEP), approved by the Cabinet on Wednesday, has a new section on digital education to ensure “equitable use of technology”.

### Enrolment ratio:

- Inclusion is a theme of the Policy beyond technology as well. The NEP emphasises universal access to schools, and aims to bring two crore out-of-school children back into the educational mainstream.
- It also aims to double the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education, including vocational education, from 26.3% in 2018 to 50% by 2035, with an additional 3.5 crore new seats.
- In order to achieve all this, public financing of education by States and Centre must grow from the current 4.43% of GDP to 6% at least, says the Policy. The



National Scholarship Portal will be expanded to support, foster, and track the progress of students receiving scholarships.

- Regions such as aspirational districts, which have large numbers of students facing economic, social or caste barriers will be designated as 'Special Educational Zones', added the Policy.

### Gender Inclusion Fund:

- The Centre will also set up a 'Gender-Inclusion Fund' to build the country's capacity to provide equitable quality education to all girls and transgender students.
- The fund will be available to States to implement priorities determined by the Central government critical for assisting female and transgender children in gaining access to education (such as the provisions of sanitation and toilets, bicycles, conditional cash transfers, etc).

## Easier exams, no cramming

### Key points:

- Under the new National Education Policy (NEP) approved by the Union Cabinet on Wednesday, Class 10 and 12 board examinations will be made easier, to test core competencies rather than memorised facts, with all students allowed to take the exam twice. Future redesigns could include modular or semester-wise board exams, exams at different levels of difficulty or separate exams for objective and descriptive type questions.
- School governance is set to change, with a new accreditation framework and an independent authority to regulate both public and private schools.

### Digital drive

The new education policy has emphasised the integration of technology in all levels of learning. Some features of the policy:

#### Technology in education

- An autonomous body, the National Educational Technology Forum, will be created for the exchange of ideas on use of technology to enhance learning, assessment, planning and administration
- A dedicated unit for the purpose of creating digital infrastructure, digital content and capacity building will be set up in the ministry
- Integration of technology will be done to improve classroom processes

#### Teacher education

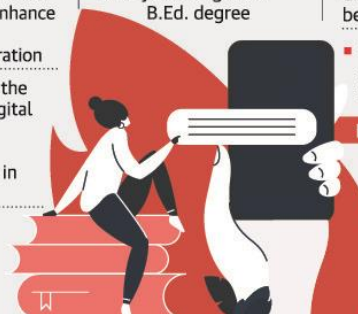
- By 2030, the minimum degree qualification for teaching will be a four-year integrated B.Ed. degree

#### Financial support

- Meritorious students belonging to SC, ST, OBC and other socially and economically disadvantaged groups will be given incentives
- Private institutions will be encouraged to offer scholarships to their students

#### Professional education

- Standalone technical universities, health science universities, legal and agricultural universities will aim at becoming multi-disciplinary institutions





- A common higher education regulator is also on the cards, to oversee the entire sector except for legal and medical education.
- In fact, a **Higher Education Commission of India Bill** for such a regulator has been in draft stage for over a year now. A broad framework will be set up to regulate fee fixation for private players as well.

### More holistic:

- Undergraduate education is to become more holistic and multi-disciplinary, with four year Bachelors with Research degrees set to become the norm, although students who drop out at earlier stages will receive lesser qualifications as well. An **Academic Bank of Credit** will be set up to make it easier to transfer between institutions. The M.Phil degree is being scrapped.
- The college affiliation system is being phased out over the next 15 years, so that every college develops into either an autonomous degree-granting institution, or a constituent college of a university.
- There is a new focus on technology in education in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the policy recommends expansion of digital offerings for both schools and universities.

### Tocilizumab fails to treat pneumonia

- Tocilizumab, a drug that was recommended by the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) for emergency use in COVID-19 patients, has been found to be ineffective in reducing the associated pneumonia, according to a press release issued by its promoters.
- Though unproven, a rise in cases and mortality translated into a global scamper for the drug. There was high demand for it in India too with stocks running out and reports that it was being blackmarketed for as much as ₹1.5 lakh a dose.
- Originally developed for rheumatoid arthritis, Actemra/RoActerma, the brand name under which the drug is sold, was first approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to be tested in large phase-3 trial randomised, double-blinded control trial called COVACTA in March.



- The primary aim was to check if the drug, which is given intravenously, improved health or reduced mortality when compared with standard of care treatment. About 450, with severe COVID-19-related pneumonia, were a part of the trial.

## High prices of pulses may affect nutrition security: study

- Food habits during COVID-19 may have shifted from diverse and nutritive diets to staple foods such as wheat and rice as the prices of vegetables, pulses and eggs rose sharply after the lockdown while those of cereals remained relatively stable, according to a new study by the Tata-Cornell Institute for Agriculture and Nutrition in New York.
- The study, “Pandemic Prices: COVID-19 price shocks and their implications for nutrition security in India,” authored by Payal Seth, Prabhu Pingali and Bhaskar Mitra, was launched earlier this month.
- It analyses prices of cereals (wheat and rice) and non-cereals (onion, tomatoes, potatoes, five pulses and eggs) in 11 tier-1 and tier-2 cities from March 1 to May 31 compared to the same period last year. It uses weekly-level retail data from the Department of Commerce Affairs of the Union government and wholesale prices from the National Egg Coordination Committee. The nationwide lockdown was imposed from March 25.
- The study revealed that following the lockdown all food groups witnessed a rise in prices compared to 2019, but the rise in prices was higher for non-cereals compared to cereals. After the lockdown was lifted, prices of cereals, eggs, potatoes, onions and tomatoes stabilised quickly while those of protein-rich pulses continued to remain high.

## Turkey approves new social media law

- Turkey adopted a new social media law on Wednesday that critics say will create a “chilling effect” on dissenting voices who have resorted to Twitter and other online platforms as the government tightened its grip on mainstream media.
- The law was backed by President Tayyip Erdogan’s AK Party and its nationalist allies to make foreign social media sites more accountable. It



requires them to appoint a local representative to address authorities' concerns.

- The law would allow Turkish authorities to remove content from platforms rather than blocking access as they have done in the past.
- Companies, including Facebook and YouTube that do not comply could have their bandwidth slashed by up to 90%, essentially blocking access, and face other penalties.

### Storing data locally:

- They must also store local users' information in Turkey, raising concerns that a state that critics say has grown more authoritarian under Mr. Erdogan will gain easy access. An estimated 90% of major media in Turkey comes under the ownership of the state or is close to the government.

## Indians the biggest group getting Australia citizenship

- More than 38,000 Indians became Australian citizens in 2019-2020, a 60% increase from the previous year and the largest diaspora group to be granted the country's citizenship.
- Out of the over 2,00,000 people who became Australian citizens in 2019-2020, 38,209 were Indians, the highest number on record, followed by 25,011 Britishers, 14,764 Chinese and 8,821 Pakistanis.
- Australia's Acting Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs Alan Tudge said citizenship was an important part of Australia's success as a socially cohesive, multicultural nation. "Becoming an Australian citizen means more than just living and working here — it's a pledge of allegiance to our nation, our people and our values..." Mr. Tudge said.
- During the ongoing COVID-19 health crisis, the Australian government has started online ceremonies which have seen over 60,000 people being conferred the citizenship. The Department of Home Affairs is resuming citizenship interviews and testing in line with COVID-19 health advice.
- As per the Australian Bureau of Statistic's 2016 census, 6,19,164 people in Australia declared that they were of ethnic Indian ancestry. This comprises 2.8% of the Australian population. Among those, 5,92,000 were born in India.