

Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan

Why in news?

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

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What is RUSA?

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- Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme launched in 2013.

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- Its aim was to increase enrolment in higher education by 30%.

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- It primarily provides strategic funding to eligible State higher educational institutions.

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What was the need?

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- India is estimated to have over 800 universities, with over 40,000 colleges affiliated to them.

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- The Centre's slant toward premier institutions has continued ever since the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-12).

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- **Central Fund** - Presently, less than 6% of students study in about 150 Centrally-funded institutions.

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- But they corner almost the entire funding by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD).

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- The funding is mainly directed towards starting more IITs, IIMs and Central universities.
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- **State Institutions** - About 94% of students of higher education study in 369 State universities.
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- In spite of a nine-fold increase in Budget allocation, State institutions have been left to fend for themselves.
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- To make things worse, investment by State governments has been dwindling each year as higher education is a low-priority area.
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- The University Grant Commission's system of direct releases to State institutions, bypassing State governments, also leads to their sense of alienation.
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- Thus, despite being the face of higher education in India, State institutions do not get their due share.
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- It was to address these critical concerns that the MHRD launched RUSA.
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How does it work?

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- The RUSA, unlike other schemes, is not imposed on State governments in a one-size-fits all manner.
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- Under RUSA, **states and institutions** have to give an undertaking expressing their **willingness** to the idea of reform.
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- They should also agree to meet the States' **share of the cost**.
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- Accordingly, preparatory grants will be released to States to have the required systems, processes, and the technical support in place.
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- The scheme is largely based on the **conditional release of funds**.
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- It is **linked to reforms** in the key areas of governance, learning-teaching outcomes, reaching out to the unreached and infrastructure support.
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What are the governance reforms central to the scheme?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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- i. improving pedagogy by capacity-building of faculty

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- ii. selecting teachers in a transparent manner

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- iii. adopting accreditation as a mandatory quality-assurance framework

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- iv. implementing semester system

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- v. involving academics of repute and distinction in decision-making processes

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How has the progress been?

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

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What is the recent decision?

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 - The Union Cabinet has recently decided to continue with the Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA).
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 - For the current year, Rs. 1,300 crore has been provided and funding is conditional to performance.
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 - It is hence critical to have a robust monitoring and evaluation system in place.
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 - In this regard, certain effective tools are in function since 2015, including:

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 - i. geo-tagging
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 - ii. introduction of a public financial management system
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 - iii. a fund tracker and reform tracker system

iv. regular video conferences

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

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

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Source: The Hindu

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