New Education Policy in West Bengal

For Prelims: New Education Policy in West Bengal, **National Education Policy 2020**, **Concurrent Subject**, Regional Autonomy, **PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development).**

For Mains: New Education Policy in West Bengal, Concerns Raised by states about NEP 2020.

Source: IE

Why in News?

Recently, the West Bengal government has announced its own **State Education Policy for 2023**, declining some of the aspects of the **NEP (National Education Policy) 2020.**

- Many states such as Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu have also **declined to adopt the NEP 2020 in its entirety.**

What are the Key Highlights of the West Bengal Education Policy?

- **Continuation of 5+4+2+2 Pattern:**
    - The state will maintain the **existing 5+4+2+2 pattern** for school education.
    - This structure begins with one year of pre-primary education, followed by four years of primary education (up to class 4), four years of upper primary education (class V to VIII), two years of secondary education, and finally, two years of higher secondary education.
        - The NEP suggests transitioning to a 5+3+3+4 school system, where Class 9-12 is considered a continuum offering students subject choices, is declined by the state government.
- **Three-Language Formula:**
    - The policy recommends the introduction of a **three-language formula for students in classes V to VIII.**
    - The first language, referred to as the "mother tongue," will be the medium of instruction.
        - For example, in Nepali-medium schools, **Nepali will be the medium of instruction**, Santhali in Santhali-medium school, and similarly for other languages and mediums.
        - The second language can be English or any language other than the first language, depending on the student's choice.
        - The third language can be any language chosen by the student, different from the first and second languages.
- **Introduction of 'Bangla' as a Subject:**
    - Bangla will be introduced as a subject from **Class I to Class XII for students** in schools with languages **other than Bangla** as the medium of instruction.
    - However, it is not recommended as a first language.
- **Semester System at Higher Secondary Level:**
    - In higher secondary education (Class XI and XII), it has introduced a semester system to

facilitate a smoother transition from school to university.
- Semester examinations may include a combination of multiple-choice questions (MCQs) and descriptive questions.

Why has West Bengal Developed its Own Education Policy Instead of Implementing NEP 2020?

- **Autonomy and Regional Needs:**
  - One of the primary reasons is the **desire for autonomy in shaping the education system** according to the unique needs and priorities of West Bengal.
  - Education is a **Concurrent Subject** in India, which means both the central and state governments can legislate on it. States often seek to customize educational policies to align with their cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic contexts.
- **Rural Disadvantage:**
  - The proposal for a common entrance test for **undergraduate courses, as suggested by NEP 2020,** raised worries in Bengal.
  - The state government fears this **could put rural students at a disadvantage** and prefers a decentralized admission approach to ensure fairness for all.
- **Historical and Cultural Factors:**
  - West Bengal has a rich cultural and linguistic diversity, with Bengali being the predominant language.
  - The state has felt that it is important to **preserve and promote the Bengali language** and culture through its education policy.
  - This could lead to **variations from the NEP,** which seeks to implement a uniform policy across the country.
  - Another point of contention is the NEP's encouragement of private-sector participation in education.
    - Bengal remains cautious about this, advocating for a **stronger role of the public sector to ensure equal and accessible** education opportunities.
- **Consideration of Alternatives:**
  - The West Bengal government has indicated its intention to analyze educational initiatives in states like Maharashtra and Kerala to propose an alternative approach.
  - This signals a **willingness to explore different models** and adapt best practices from other states.

What is NEP 2020?

- **About:**
  - The NEP 2020 aims at making "India a global knowledge superpower". It is only the 3rd major revamp of the framework of education in India since independence.
    - The two earlier education policies were brought in 1968 and 1986.
- **Salient Features:**
  - Ensuring Universal Access at All Levels of schooling from pre-primary school to Grade 12.
  - Ensuring quality early childhood care and education for all children between 3-6 years.
  - New Curricular and Pedagogical Structure (5+3+3+4) corresponds to the age groups of 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years respectively.
    - It covers four stages of schooling: Foundational Stage (5 years), Preparatory Stage (3 years), Middle Stage (3 years), and Secondary Stage (4 years).
  - No hard separations between arts and sciences, between curricular and extra-curricular activities, between vocational and academic streams;
  - Emphasis on promoting multilingualism and Indian languages
  - Setting up of a new National Assessment Centre, **PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development)**
  - A separate Gender Inclusion fund and Special Education Zones for disadvantaged regions and groups.

What are the Issues With NEP 2020?

- **Size and Diversity:**
  - India's education sector is **enormous and diverse, making it challenging to implement uniform policies** across the country.
  - The country's vast population, multiple languages, and varying socio-economic conditions necessitate localized approaches to education, which the NEP's one-size-fits-all approach may not adequately address.
- **Capacity Limitation:**
  - The NEP 2020 proposes significant transformations in the education sector, from the school level to higher education.
  - However, many **states and regulatory bodies lack the internal capacities** and resources needed to implement such wide-ranging changes effectively.
- **Language and Curriculum:**
  - Adapting curriculum materials to be taught in the mother tongue is a key feature of the NEP 2020.
  - However, India's linguistic diversity, with 22 official languages and numerous dialects, **poses a significant challenge.**
  - States are concerned about the practicality of implementing this aspect and ensuring quality education in multiple languages.
- **Digital Divide:**
  - The NEP emphasizes the use of technology in education, including e-learning and digitization.
  - However, India faces a **digital divide where a substantial portion of the population lacks access** to smartphones and computers.
  - This divide could lead to unequal access to educational resources and opportunities, disadvantaged marginalized communities.
- **Limited Resources:**
  - The NEP calls for a substantial increase in the allocation of resources for education, targeting 6% of the GDP.
  - Achieving this level of funding may be **difficult given the competing demands on government finances,** such as healthcare, infrastructure, and social welfare programs. States may struggle to allocate sufficient resources to meet NEP objectives.
- **Local Autonomy:**
  - Some states are concerned about the NEP's perceived centralization of education policy and decision-making.
  - They believe that it infringes on their **autonomy to design and implement education policies** that align with their specific needs and priorities.

Way Forward

- Encourage meaningful consultation with all stakeholders, including state governments, educators, parents, and students. Seek feedback and input to address concerns and make necessary adjustments to the NEP.
- Recognize and respect the diversity of India's education landscape. Allow states flexibility in implementing policies to cater to their specific linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic contexts. Adapt the NEP's provisions to be more regionally relevant.
- Invest in building the capacity of education ministries, regulatory bodies, and educators to effectively implement the NEP. Provide training and resources to equip them for the challenges of transforming the education system.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Which of the following provisions of the Constitution does India have a bearing on Education? (2012)

1. Directive Principles of State Policy
2. Rural and Urban Local Bodies
3. Fifth Schedule
4. Sixth Schedule
5. Seventh Schedule

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 3, 4 and 5 only
(c) 1, 2 and 5 only
(d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Ans- (d)

Mains

Q. National Education Policy 2020 is in conformity with the Sustainable Development Goal-4 (2030). It intends to restructure and reorient education system in India. Critically examine the statement. **(2020)**

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