
Prelims Exam Topics

ATMANIRBHAR PANCHAYAT PROGRAMME

Context

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj launched the Atmanirbhar Panchayat Programme along with the SAMARTH Panchayat Portal.

About Atmanirbhar Panchayat Programme

- **Nature:** An initiative of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to strengthen the financial self-reliance of Gram and Block Panchayats.
- **Objective:** To help Panchayats identify local assets and economic opportunities and develop them into bankable, revenue-generating projects for enhancing Own Source Revenue (OSR).
- **Implementation:** Provides technical support to Panchayats, while financing is facilitated through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), convergence with government schemes, bank finance, with NABARD and HUDCO as institutional partners.
- **Eligibility:** Open to Gram Panchayats with a minimum OSR of ₹50 lakh and Block Panchayats with a minimum OSR of ₹1 crore, each having at least three years of tenure remaining; special category States have relaxed eligibility criteria.

About SAMARTH Panchayat Portal

- **Nature:** A digital platform developed by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj for technology-enabled management of Own Source Revenue (OSR) by Gram Panchayats.
- **Functions:** Enables the complete OSR lifecycle, including taxpayer registration, demand generation, online payment, revenue collection, and real-time monitoring.
- **Implementation:** Chhattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh are the first States to be onboarded.

ATAL BEEMIT VYAKTI KALYAN YOJANA (ABVKY)

Context

The Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) has extended the Atal Beemit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana (ABVKY) from 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027.

About Atal Beemit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana (ABVKY)

- **Nature:** An **unemployment relief scheme** for workers covered under the **Employees' State Insurance (ESI) Act, 1948**.
- **Objective:** To provide **temporary financial assistance** to insured workers who lose their jobs while they seek new employment.
- **Benefit:** Provides **50% of the average daily wages** (based on the previous **four contribution periods**) for a maximum of **90 days, once during the insured person's lifetime**.
- **Eligibility:** Applicable to insured persons covered under the **ESI Act** who have **at least two years of insurable employment**, contributed for **at least 78 days in each of the previous four contribution periods**, remain unemployed, and have **Aadhaar and a bank account linked**.
- **Exclusions:** Benefits are **not available** in cases of **voluntary resignation/retirement, disciplinary dismissal, illegal strike, lockout, re-employment, superannuation, contributory service below two years, conviction under the ESI Act, or death**. Claims must be submitted **within one year of unemployment**.

BLUE STRAGGLER STAR (BSS)

Context

Indian astronomers, along with international collaborators, have reported the **rare discovery of a Blue Straggler Star (BSS) in the process of formation**, providing direct evidence of its formation through mass transfer in a binary star system.

About Blue Straggler Star (BSS)

- **Nature:** **Blue Straggler Stars (BSS)** are a peculiar class of stars found in **star clusters** that appear **hotter, brighter, and more massive** than other stars of the same age.
- **Occurrence:** They are commonly observed in **old, dense stellar systems** such as **globular clusters**, and are also found in **open clusters, dwarf galaxies, and the galactic field**.
- **Characteristic:** They lie **beyond the main-sequence turn-off point** on the **colour-magnitude diagram**, indicating an **unusual evolutionary path**.
- **Unique Evolution:** Unlike normal stars, which become **cooler and larger** with age, Blue Stragglers remain **hotter, bluer, and more luminous**, appearing younger than neighbouring stars.
- **Formation:** They are believed to form through **mass transfer from a companion star** or **stellar mergers**; the latest discovery provides **direct observational evidence** for formation through **mass transfer in a binary system**.

- **Recent Discovery:** The forming BSS was identified in the **binary system TIC 327546480** in the **open cluster Collinder 261**, where the companion star is transferring matter after overflowing its **Roche lobe**.

BHARGAVASTRA COUNTER-DRONE SYSTEM

Context

A new counter-swarm drone system called 'Bhargavastra' has been showcased to the army.

About Bhargavastra Counter-Drone System

- **Nature:** An **indigenously developed, vehicle-mounted counter-drone system** designed to detect, track, and neutralise **individual drones, drone swarms, and loitering munitions**.
- **Objective:** To provide a **mobile, layered, and cost-effective air defence** against the growing threat of unmanned aerial systems.
- **Layered Defence:** Combines **unguided micro-rockets** (20 m lethal radius), **precision-guided micro-missiles**(interception range up to **2.5 km**), and **electronic jamming (soft-kill)** to neutralise drones.
- **Operational Capability:** Detects **large UAVs up to 10 km** and **small drones up to 6 km**, operates from **deserts to high-altitude regions above 5,000 m**, and is resistant to conventional electronic warfare measures such as jamming.

MUSEUM GRANT SCHEME

Context

The **Ministry of Culture** informed the **Lok Sabha** that it is implementing the **Museum Grant Scheme** to strengthen museum infrastructure and heritage conservation across India.

Museum Grant Scheme

- **Nature:** A **Central Sector Scheme** of the **Ministry of Culture**, launched in **2013**.
- **Objective:** To provide **financial assistance** for establishing new museums, modernising existing museums, promoting **digitisation of museum collections**, and **building professional capacity** in the museum sector.
- **Coverage:** Supports **Central and State Governments, Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), Societies, Autonomous Bodies, Local Bodies, Academic Institutions, and registered Trusts** for museum development.

- **Categories:** Classifies museums into **Category I** (renowned Central/State Government museums in State capitals), **Category II** (other Central/State Government and PSU museums), and **Category III** (Societies, Autonomous Bodies, Local Bodies, Academic Institutions, PSUs, and registered Trusts), each with separate funding norms.
- **Financial Assistance:** Provides grants of up to **₹15 crore (Category I)**, **₹10 crore for new and ₹8 crore for existing Category II museums**, and **₹5 crore for new and ₹4 crore for existing Category III museums**. Additional support is available for **digitisation and training of museum professionals**.

NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY AUTHORITY (NBA)

Context

The **National Biodiversity Authority (NBA)** has constituted a **multi-disciplinary Expert Committee on Invasive Alien Species** following directions from the **National Green Tribunal (NGT)**.

About National Biodiversity Authority (NBA)

- **Nature:** An **autonomous statutory body** under the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**.
- **Establishment:** Constituted under the **Biological Diversity Act, 2002**, to implement India's obligations under the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**.
- **Objective:** To promote the **conservation of biological diversity**, **sustainable use** of biological resources, and **fair and equitable sharing of benefits (Access and Benefit Sharing – ABS)** arising from their use.
- **Regulatory Functions:** Grants approvals for **foreign access to biological resources**, transfer of research results, and **Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)** applications based on Indian biological resources.
- **Institutional Framework:** Coordinates with **State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs)** and oversees **Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs)**, which prepare **People's Biodiversity Registers (PBRs)** to document local biodiversity and traditional knowledge.
- **Advisory Role:** Advises governments on **biodiversity conservation**, **notification of Biodiversity Heritage Sites**, and constitutes **expert committees** to address emerging ecological issues.

UNESCO LIST OF WORLD HERITAGE IN DANGER

Context

During the **48th Session of the World Heritage Committee at Busan, South Korea**, UNESCO added **six sites** to the **List of World Heritage in Danger**.

About UNESCO List of World Heritage in Danger

- **Nature:** An international conservation mechanism established under the **1972 World Heritage Convention**.
- **Objective:** To identify **World Heritage Sites** facing serious threats and facilitate **emergency technical assistance, international cooperation, and corrective conservation measures**.

New Additions to the List of World Heritage in Danger (2026)

- **Boma-Badingilo Migratory Landscape (South Sudan):** East African savanna hosting the world's largest terrestrial mammal migration; threatened by **poaching, wildlife trafficking, infrastructure development, and insecurity**.
- **Mount Amel Castles (Lebanon):** Network of **five medieval hilltop fortresses**; threatened by **damage from ongoing armed conflict**.
- **Sebastia (State of Palestine):** Archaeological site preserving remains from the **9th century BCE to the Ottoman period**; threatened by **land acquisition, conflict, development pressure, and erosion**.
- **Ancient City of Tauric Chersonese and its Chora (Ukraine):** Ancient Greek city on the Black Sea coast; threatened by **conflict-related conservation challenges, unauthorised construction, and excavations**.
- **Historic Inner City of Paramaribo (Suriname):** Former **Dutch colonial town** known for its unique architectural heritage; threatened by **high-density urban development**.
- **Tyre (Lebanon):** Ancient **Phoenician city** renowned for its harbour and Roman monuments; threatened by **ongoing regional armed hostilities**.

Mains Exam Topics

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF SCHOOL EDUCATION

Context

India's school education system is undergoing a major transformation. However, persistent concerns over learning outcomes, governance, assessment, and recent examination-related controversies highlight the need to balance expansion with quality, accountability, and credibility.

Why Has Education Emerged as a Principal Arena of Cooperative Federalism in India?

- **Shared Legislative Jurisdiction:** Education is placed in the **Concurrent List**, giving both the Centre and States constitutional authority to legislate on the subject. This shared legislative competence requires educational reforms to be developed within a common constitutional framework rather than through unilateral law-making.
 - e.g., The **42nd Constitutional Amendment (1976)** shifted education from the State List to the Concurrent List, establishing shared legislative responsibility between the Union and the States.
- **Fiscal Interdependence:** Large-scale educational reforms require financial resources beyond the capacity of most states, making joint financing essential. Consequently, major programmes are implemented through Centre–State cost-sharing arrangements rather than being funded independently by either tier of government.
 - e.g., **Samagra Shiksha** follows a **60:40 Centre–State funding pattern** (90:10 for North-Eastern and Himalayan states), making financial participation by both levels of government indispensable.
- **Policy–Execution Divide:** The Centre primarily formulates national policy frameworks and academic standards, while States are responsible for translating them into classroom practice through curriculum, teacher management and school administration. This functional division makes education dependent on sustained Centre–State collaboration.
 - e.g., **NEP 2020** and the **National Curriculum Framework (NCF)** provide national policy direction, whereas States implement them through **SCERTs**, textbook boards and teacher-training institutions.
- **Regional Diversity and Federal Accommodation:** Education is closely linked to language, culture and regional identity, requiring national policies to accommodate diverse state preferences

instead of imposing a uniform model. As a result, **negotiated accommodation** becomes an inherent feature of educational policymaking.

- e.g., NEP 2020 recommends the **three-language formula**, but leaves the choice of languages to individual states, allowing implementation to reflect regional linguistic priorities.
- **Institutionalised Intergovernmental Forums:** Education has dedicated institutional platforms that facilitate regular consultation between the Centre and the States. These forums provide the **standing institutional mechanism** through which policy differences are deliberated and cooperative decisions are reached.
 - e.g., The **Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE)** brings together the Union Education Minister and State Education Ministers to deliberate on major education policies before implementation.

Why have improvements in school enrolment not translated into proportional improvements in learning outcomes?

- **Access-Centric Policy Design:** Education reforms initially prioritised universalising school access by making enrolment and infrastructure legally enforceable, while learning quality remained a secondary implementation priority. Consequently, schooling expanded faster than the system's ability to ensure learning.
 - e.g., The **RTE Act, 2009** guaranteed universal enrolment and prescribed infrastructure norms, whereas **class-wise Learning Outcomes** were formally notified only in 2017.
- **Pedagogical Mismatch:** Because enrollment expanded rapidly, classrooms became more diverse with first-generation learners and students at different learning levels. However, teaching methods continued to be syllabus-driven and grade-specific rather than tailored to actual learning needs.
 - e.g., Under the **RTE Act**, children were admitted to **age-appropriate grades**, while structured remedial approaches such as **Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)** gained policy attention only later through initiatives like **NIPUN Bharat (2021)**.
- **Weak Learning Accountability:** Since classrooms could not adequately bridge these learning gaps, assessment systems needed to identify and correct them early. Instead, accountability mechanisms largely tracked progression and compliance rather than mastery of foundational competencies.

- e.g., The **No-Detention Policy** under **Section 16 of the RTE Act** (before its 2019 amendment) reduced incentives for timely academic remediation, while **UDISE+** primarily monitors enrolment and infrastructure rather than routine learning outcomes.
- **Compounding of Undetected Learning Gaps:** Because foundational gaps were neither identified nor effectively remediated, they accumulated across grades. As each stage of the curriculum assumes mastery of previous competencies, early learning deficits progressively reduced students' ability to absorb higher-level concepts.
 - e.g., **NAS** shows lower proficiency in higher grades across many competencies, reflecting the cumulative effect of weak foundational learning over the school cycle.
- **Demand-Side Learning Constraints:** Even where schools function effectively, learning is influenced by factors beyond the classroom. Low parental literacy, limited home learning support, poor early childhood development and socio-economic deprivation constrain children's ability to benefit fully from schooling.
 - e.g., Studies such as **ASER** and **IHDS** find that children from households with higher parental education and stronger home learning environments achieve significantly better learning outcomes.

How far has standardisation reshaped educational governance in India?

- **Uniform Curricular Architecture:** National authorities increasingly prescribe common curricular frameworks, reducing variation in what students are expected to learn across states. This has shifted curriculum design towards nationally defined learning standards.
 - e.g., The **National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023**, developed under **NEP 2020**, provides common curricular principles and learning standards for states to adapt while revising their curricula.
- **Standardised Assessment Frameworks:** Student learning is increasingly measured through common competency-based assessment frameworks, enabling comparison of learning outcomes across states.
 - e.g., The **National Achievement Survey (NAS)** assesses students across states using common competency frameworks, while **PARAKH** has been established under **NCERT** to develop norms, standards and guidelines for student assessment.
- **Uniform Teacher Eligibility Standards:** Minimum eligibility for appointment as a school teacher is increasingly governed by nationally prescribed standards, creating greater consistency in teacher qualification norms across the country.

- e.g., The **National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)** prescribes guidelines for **Teacher Eligibility Tests (TETs)**, including **CTET** and **State TETs**, to maintain minimum teacher eligibility standards.
- **Standardised Educational Records:** Educational governance increasingly relies on common digital information systems to standardise educational data and learner records across institutions.
 - e.g., **UDISE+** provides a uniform national database on school education, while **APAAR** introduces a unique student identifier to facilitate maintenance of academic records across different stages of education.
- **Federal Diversity Persists:** Despite increasing standardisation, states continue to retain significant autonomy over curriculum adaptation, language policy and implementation, limiting complete uniformity in educational governance.
 - e.g., States such as **Tamil Nadu** have not adopted the **three-language formula** proposed in **NEP 2020**, and states continue to develop and prescribe their own **SCERT** textbooks.

Way Forward

- **Outcome-Oriented Accountability:** Educational success should be judged primarily by **learning outcomes** rather than enrolment, infrastructure or completion rates, ensuring that schooling translates into measurable competencies.
 - e.g., **NIPUN Bharat** should be complemented by **regular census-based foundational learning assessments**, enabling early identification of learning gaps instead of relying primarily on periodic sample surveys such as **ASER**.
- **Structured Academic Remediation:** Learning gaps should trigger timely remedial support before students progress to higher grades, preventing weak foundations from accumulating over time.
 - e.g., The **2019 amendment to the RTE Act** permitting detention at **Classes 5 and 8** should be accompanied by mandatory **bridge courses and remedial instruction** before any decision on grade repetition.
- **Teacher Capacity for Diverse Classrooms:** Teacher preparation should equip educators to handle classrooms with varied learning levels through differentiated and competency-based instruction rather than uniform syllabus completion.
 - e.g., **Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)** can be integrated into teacher training and classroom practice to support students with differing foundational learning levels.

- **Cooperative Educational Federalism:** Major education reforms should be shaped through continuous Centre–State consultation, ensuring that national priorities incorporate state-level administrative and contextual realities.
 - e.g., Institutions such as the **Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE)** should be used as regular platforms for Centre–State consultation during major policy reforms.
- **Stable Fiscal Federalism:** School education requires predictable and adequate fiscal support, enabling states to implement long-term reforms without disruptions arising from uncertain funding.
 - e.g., **Samagra Shiksha** funding can be supported through more predictable multi-year financial commitments to improve continuity in implementation.
- **Flexible National Standards:** National standards should define minimum learning and quality benchmarks while allowing states flexibility in curriculum adaptation, pedagogy and language to reflect local needs.
 - e.g., The **National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023** provides common curricular principles, while states adapt them through their respective **SCERTs** and textbooks.
- **Interoperable Digital Governance:** Digital education platforms should promote common data standards that enable seamless record management while supporting efficient administration across institutions.
 - e.g., **UDISE+** standardises school-level educational data, while **APAAR** facilitates continuity of learners' academic records across different stages of education.