

AN INDIA CHAPTER FOR FOREIGN UNIVERSITIES

The Hindu

Paper - II
(Indian Polity)

In Context

For a long time, proponents of the internationalisation of higher education have cherished the dream of foreign universities operating in India. For nearly two decades, they have emphasised the need to provide conducive conditions and an enabling framework for such institutions. But the idea failed to come to fruition due to the concerns of the regulatory authorities and governments in India as well as the foreign higher educational institutions.

Concerns about

- Some of the major concerns of foreign universities operating in India are issues regarding—
 - ↳ Promoting excellence.
 - ↳ Preventing malpractices.
 - ↳ Safeguarding the interests of students.
 - ↳ Protecting national interests etc.
- Many were wary of the cultural threat that this initiative posed. Some of those who were at the forefront of preserving the purity of Indian culture are now a part of the political dispensation. Policy planners and regulators have been particularly concerned about how to come up with a framework that attracts the best of the best and deters the fly-by-night kinds of universities.
- On the other hand, the sought-after universities are concerned about the potential adverse effect of setting up offshore campuses on their accreditation, ranking, and reputation. Truly reputed higher educational institutions operate on a not-for-profit basis and have no materialistic motives to go offshore.

- A few countries that have such off-shore campuses had to hard-sell the institutions the idea by leasing land at almost no cost, bearing the bulk of infrastructure cost and promising them the academic, administrative, and financial autonomy that they enjoy in their home country. India could hardly afford any such incentives. Whatever was offered was riddled with caveats and contradictions.

Provisions under NEP 2020 and efforts of UGC

- Past setbacks notwithstanding, the idea of having world-class universities establish and operate their campuses in India has been so compelling that the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provided that “selected universities e.g., those from among the top 100 universities in the world will be facilitated to operate in India. A legislative framework facilitating such entry will be put in place, and such universities will be given special dispensation regarding regulatory, governance, and content norms on par with other autonomous institutions of India.”
- Even though the NEP favoured a “legislative framework”, the idea is being executed through a regula-

Why in news?

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has announced draft norms to facilitate foreign universities and educational institutions to set up campuses in India giving them autonomy in decision-making.

Why the need for a foreign university?

- India not only has the second-largest educational system in the world, but also one of the most complex and least understood educational environments in the world. Its higher education sector is fragmented, inflexible with rigid subject boundaries and of uneven quality.
- The focus of NEP 2020 is on integration, which aims to bring in flexibility and multi-disciplinary education and improve quality.
- India ranks third in terms of the number of PhDs awarded in science and engineering. India's Global Innovation Index ranking has also improved significantly, falling from 81 in 2014 to 40 in 2022, though it remains far behind the US and China.
- India has established the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), which has helped promote competition among institutions. India's global ranking in scientific publications improved from seventh in 2010 to third in 2020.

National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF)

- NIRF was launched in 2015 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) (now the Ministry of Education (MoE)). The framework outlines a methodology to rank institutions across the country.
- The methodology draws from a comprehensive understanding and overall recommendations made by a core committee constituted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development to identify broad parameters for ranking various universities and institutions.
- The NIRF ranking is based on six parameters- Teaching-Learning & Resources, Research & Professional Practices, Graduation Outcomes, Outreach & Inclusivity, and Perception of the Institution.

tory route by the University Grants Commission (UGC). There seems to be the determination to get the idea going, even if it amounts to some dilution in standards.

- While the policy prescribed “facilitation” and “special dispensation” for the top 100 universities of the world, the draft regulation seeks to lower the standards by extending the scope to the top 500 universities overall or in any discipline.
- Further, for the “educational institutions”, just being “reputed” in their home country would be a sufficient requirement. The draft regulation doesn’t seem concerned about the subjectivity and scope of discretion in the above articulation as it believes that the standing committee constituted by the UGC would do an unbiased and thorough job in processing the applications and identifying only the best institutions.

Curriculum vitae and conditions

- The initiative may still fail due to contradictions in the regulation. The draft regulation demands that the quality of education imparted by these institutions in India must be on par with the quality of courses at their campus in the country of origin. Yet, it insists that they must not “offer any such programme of study which jeopardises the national interest of India or the standards of higher education in India”.
- It promises academic, administrative, and financial autonomy to foreign institutions but takes that away by asserting that they abide by all the conditions that the UGC and the Indian government prescribe from time to time.

Mode of Teaching

- It will also have the autonomy to recruit faculty and staff from India and abroad.
- The courses to be offered cannot be online and open and in distance learning mode.
- The qualifications awarded to the students in the Indian campus should have equivalence with those awarded by the institutions in their country of origin.
- Such universities and colleges cannot offer any such programme of study which jeopardises the national interest of India or the standards of higher education in India.

Fund Management

- Foreign universities will be allowed to repatriate funds to parent campuses.
- Cross-border movement of funds and maintenance of Foreign Currency Accounts, mode of payments, remittance, repatriation, and sale of proceeds, if any, will be as per the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) 1999 and its Rules.
- It will also have the autonomy to decide its fee structure and will face no caps that are imposed on Indian institutions. The fee should be “reasonable and transparent.”

- The provision that the foreign higher education institutions must not do anything “contrary to the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality” might deter the best universities that most value their academic autonomy.

Stopping forex outflow due to Indian students studying abroad

- Leaving aside the issue of whether the idea would succeed, one wonders why India is so keen on foreign higher education. During a media briefing, it was stated that foreign universities in India would stop the outflow of \$28-30 billion in foreign exchange.
- This does not corroborate the data on outward remittances for studies abroad, as reported by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). During 2021-22, foreign outflow on account of studies abroad was no more than \$5.165 billion.
- One could argue that even this is a substantive sum and must be stopped from flowing abroad, but the idea of import substitution in higher education is complicated. Students do not go abroad for degrees alone; they also go for the experience, post-study work visas, income opportunities, and better career prospects. Studying in a foreign university in India would offer them none of these. Most critically, as they are able to finance a good part of their education abroad through jobs, assistantships, and scholarships, they find it more economical.

Way Forward

- Still, India needs to have an enabling framework for the entry and operation of foreign higher educational institutions. It must, however, ensure that the best of the best set up their campuses in the country.
- If the Indian higher education sector truly opens up, it will be one step forward in India’s aspiration to become a knowledge society again, if not actually a Vishwa-guru.
- Not protectionism and shuttering our intellectual borders, but competition and collaboration with the best will help usher in a true Indian renaissance.

Expected Question

Que. Which of the following provisions of the Constitution does India have a bearing on Education?

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

Answer : C

Mains Expected Question & Format

Que.: How have digital initiatives in India contributed to the functioning of the education system in the country? Elaborate on your answer.

Answer Format :

- ❖ Explain the digital initiative brought in the field of education.
- ❖ Elaborate the contribution of digital initiatives in the education system.
- ❖ Give a balanced conclusion.

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.