

NEXT IAS

**DAILY EDITORIAL
ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

**VIKSIT BHARAT SHIKSHA
ADHISTHAN BILL & HIGHER
EDUCATION GOVERNANCE**

www.nextias.com

VIKSIT BHARAT SHIKSHA ADHISTHAN BILL & HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE

Context

- The proposed **Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhistan (VBSA) Bill** seeks to operationalise the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**. However, concerns arise regarding **constitutional validity, federal balance, institutional autonomy, and social justice**.

Key Features of the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhistan (VBSA) Bill

- **Statutory Framework:** Bill seeks to **legally implement the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**. It moves from policy vision to a **binding institutional structure** for higher education governance.
- **Creation of Centralised Apex Body:** It establishes a **central umbrella institution (Adhistan)**.
 - ♦ It brings multiple regulatory functions under one framework, and reflects a shift towards **integrated but centralised governance**.
- **Three-Tier Council Structure:** The Bill proposes **vertical division of functions** into specialized councils:
 - ♦ **Regulatory Council (Viniyaman Parishad):** Responsible for licensing and recognition of institutions, governance norms, and institutional compliance.
 - ♦ **Accreditation Council (Gunvatta Parishad):** Handles accreditation through **third-party agencies**, quality benchmarking, and technology-driven assessments.
 - ♦ **Standards Council (Manak Parishad):** Sets academic standards, curriculum frameworks, and learning benchmarks.
- **Expanded Regulatory Powers of the Union:** Central councils get powers to **set standards**, conduct inspections, impose penalties, and approve or close institutions.
- **Coverage of All HEIs:** Applies to Central universities, State universities, Private institutions, and Institutes of national importance (IITs, IIMs, etc.).
 - ♦ It creates a **uniform national regulatory regime**.
- **Reduced Role of UGC:** Replaces/dilutes **University Grants Commission (UGC)** functions, and weakens consultative inspection mechanisms, and institutional autonomy safeguards.
- **Centralised Funding Control:** The Ministry of Education gains **greater control over fund allocation**, and proposes restructuring funding via new mechanisms (e.g., HEGC).
 - ♦ It signals a shift toward **performance-linked and centralised funding**.
- **Emphasis on Outcome-Based Evaluation:** Focus on research output (publications, patents), global rankings, and employability.
 - ♦ It moves toward **quantitative performance metrics**.
- **Promotion of 'Bhartiya Knowledge Systems':** Incorporates indigenous knowledge frameworks into curriculum and standards.
 - ♦ It aims at **cultural integration**, though debated in scope and interpretation.
- **Market-Oriented and Global Outlook:** Encourages internationalisation, global benchmarking, and private sector participation.
 - ♦ It aligns with **global higher education trends**.
- **Penalty-Based Compliance Mechanism:** Introduces **graded financial penalties** for violations; and regulatory enforcement becomes **more stringent and formalised**.
- **Technology-Driven Governance:** Accreditation and monitoring through digital platforms, and data-driven evaluation systems.
 - ♦ It enhances **efficiency but risks over-standardisation**.

Concerns & Issues Surrounding Bill

- **Overreach of Union Powers: Union List (Entry 66)** limits Parliament to *coordination and determination of standards*.
 - ♦ It may violate the **federal structure**, as education is in the **Concurrent List**.

- **Undermining State Autonomy:** States are **primary funders of higher education**. The bill excludes meaningful State participation.
 - ◆ It contradicts principles of **shared governance in federal systems**.
- **Bureaucratic Centralisation:** Power concentrated in Union-controlled councils. Minimal role for universities, faculty bodies, and academic councils leads to **top-down governance**.
 - ◆ Excessive bureaucratisation reduces **academic innovation and institutional autonomy**.
- **Erosion of UGC Framework:** UGC's consultative inspection model diluted, as bill allows **non-consultative inspections and penalties**.
 - ◆ It undermines **participatory regulation**.
- **Loss of Institutional Autonomy:** IITs, IIMs, and universities lose governing independence, as closure and recognition powers are centralized.
 - ◆ It weakens **self-regulation and academic freedom**.
- **Absence of Affirmative Action:** No explicit provisions for SC/ST/OBC reservations, and inclusive access, risking widening of **social inequalities**.
- **Marketisation of Education:** Encourages loans over public funding, and output-based rankings.
 - ◆ It promotes **neoliberal model of higher education**.
- **Cultural and Ideological Concerns:** 'Bhartiya Knowledge Systems' framed narrowly, and potential ideological bias.
 - ◆ It challenges India's **pluralistic knowledge traditions**.
- **Centralised Councils:** Regulatory (Viniyaman Parishad), Accreditation (Gunvatta Parishad), and Standards (Manak Parishad) are controlled centrally that reduce **context-specific policymaking**.
- **Flaws in Accreditation and Evaluation:** Third-party accreditation leads to weak accountability.
 - ◆ **Output-based metrics** like patents and publications ignore social impact and regional needs.

Way Forward: Key Reform Suggestions

- **Strengthening Federalism:** Need of 50:50 representation in Union Councils, and State Higher Education Councils (SHECs); and to establish **regional councils**.
 - ◆ There is also a need to include teachers, students, and non-teaching staff.
- **Institutional Autonomy:** Limit bureaucratic control, and ensure **consultative inspections**.
- **Equity and Social Justice:** Explicit provisions for reservation, and inter-regional equity.
- **Funding Reforms:** Establish **Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC)** for equitable funding, support for State universities, and reduce regional disparities.
- **Contextualised Standards:** Sector-wise and State-wise standards, and move from **prescriptive to deliberative regulation**.

Conclusion

- The VBSA Bill represents a **transformative but contentious shift** in higher education governance.
- It risks **centralisation over federalism, bureaucratisation over autonomy, marketisation over social justice** while aiming for standardisation and global competitiveness.
- For India's higher education system to thrive, reforms need to align with **cooperative federalism, democratic governance, equity and inclusiveness**.

Source: TH

Daily Mains Practice Question

- [Q] Examine the constitutional, federal, and institutional implications of the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhithan (VBSA) Bill. Suggest measures to ensure a balance between quality, autonomy, and cooperative federalism in higher education.

