

“The right thing to do and the hard thing to do are usually the same.” Steve Maraboli

NATIONAL

HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION OF INDIA (HECI) TO REPLACE UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION

The Centre has placed in the public domain a draft Bill for a **Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)** – aimed at replacing the University Grants Commission – for eliciting suggestions from educationists.

Draft Higher Education Commission of India – a Regulator:

HECI is tasked with the mandate of **improving academic standards with specific focus on learning outcomes, evaluation of academic performance by institutions, mentoring of institutions, training of teachers, promote use of educational technology.**

The **draft HECI India (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act) Act, 2018**, takes away funding powers from the proposed regulator and gives it powers to ensure academic quality and even close down bogus institutions.

HECI will be in charge of ensuring academic quality in universities and colleges, the **Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)** – or another mechanism that will be put in place later – will be responsible for funding universities and colleges.

Once UGC is replaced by HECI, the technical education regulator **AICTE and the teachers' education regulator NCTE will also be reformed on similar lines.**

The new regime separates the academic and funding aspects of higher education.

The Regulator will have powers to enforce compliance to the academic quality standards and will have the power to order closure of sub-standard and bogus institutions.

It will develop norms for setting standards for opening and closure of institutions, provide for greater flexibility and autonomy to institutions, lay standards for appointments to critical leadership positions at the institutional level irrespective of university started under any law (including state list).

Non-compliance could result in fines or even a jail sentence.

Till now, the UGC had no such powers. All it could do was to release a list of bogus institutions and not recognize their degrees.

UGC staff would be retrained to adapt to the HECI regime, which will be fully digital and would do away with file work.

The HECI will have a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson and 12 other members, including ex-officio members, eminent academics and a doyen of industry.

UGC (University Grants Commission):

The University Grants Commission of India (UGC India) is a statutory body set up by the Indian Union government in accordance to the UGC Act 1956 under Ministry of Human Resource Development.

The UGC has two primary responsibilities providing funds to educational institutions; and coordinating, determining and maintaining standards in institutions of higher education.

Its main functions:

- promoting and coordinating education in universities,
- determining and maintaining standards for teaching, examination and research in universities,
- framing regulations on minimum standards for education,
- disbursing grants to universities and colleges,
- liaising between the CG, State governments and higher educational institutions, and
- Advising the CG and State governments on possible policy measures to improve higher education in India.

REUNITE

Union Minister of Commerce & Industry and Civil Aviation, Suresh Prabhu today launched a

mobile application called **ReUnite** which helps to track and trace missing and abandoned children in India. Speaking on this occasion the Minister appreciated the work being done by the NGO, BachpanBachaoAndolan&Capgemini for developing this app.

The app is multiuser where parents and citizens can upload pictures of children, and provide detailed description like name, birth mark, address, report to the police station, search and identify missing kids.

The photographs will not be saved in the mobile phone's physical memory. Amazon Rekognition, web facial recognition service, is being used to identify missing kids. The app is available for both Android and iOS.

BachpanBachaoAndolan, (BBA) is India's largest movement for the protection of children and works along with law enforcement agencies and policymakers. BBA has played a very important role in formulation of several laws for protection of child's rights.

NITI AAYOG TO RELEASE THE FIRST DELTA RANKING OF THE ASPIRATIONAL DISTRICTS PROGRAMME

NITI Aayog will release the First Delta Ranking of the Aspirational Districts Programme

The ranking will measure the incremental progress made by districts between March 31, 2018, and May 31, 2018.

The districts have been ranked in a transparent basis on parameters across Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture & Water Resources, Financial Inclusion & Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure through 49 key performance indicators.

The rankings are publicly available through the Champions of Change Dashboard, which includes data entered on a real-time basis at the district level.

The Delta ranking seeks to highlight the Districts who have achieved incremental progress between the months of March 2018 and May 2018.

Aspirational District Programme:

The Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP) is an essential retreat from India's previous development strategies in its ownership, scope, and scale based on "One-size-fits-all" approach.

115 districts were chosen by senior officials of the Union government in consultation with State officials on the basis of a composite index of the following:

Deprivation enumerated under the Socio-Economic Caste Census,

Key health and education performance indicators and the state of basic infrastructure

A minimum of one district was chosen from every State.

The areas under the programme that have been targeted for transformation are education, health and nutrition, agriculture and water resources, financial inclusion, basic infrastructure and skills.

There is no financial package or large allocation of funds to this programme

Its aim is to leverage the resources of the several government programmes that already exist but are not always used efficiently.

WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS PLATFORM SIGNED FIVE SEPARATE STATEMENT OF INTENT (SOIS)

NITI Aayog's Women Entrepreneurs Platform (WEP) has signed five separate Statement of Intent (SOIs) with Financial Institutions & Social Organisations. These SOIs will provide financial assistance to women entrepreneurs and address the finance related challenges faced by them through WEP.

Women Entrepreneurship Platform:

The initiative is aimed at building an ecosystem for women across India to realize their entrepreneurial aspirations, scale-up innovative initiatives and chalk-out sustainable, long-term strategies for their businesses. This will be done through an enabling network of industry collaborations, partnerships, mentors and peer-to-peer connect.

From providing unique services such as credit evaluation of women-led startups by CRISIL and potential equity investments through an INR 10 crore fund established by DICE Districts, the WEP opens up avenues of growth and opportunity for women entrepreneurs.

Need for economic empowerment of women:

Economically empowered women are major catalysts for development. There is greater recognition of the positive relationship between increased economic activity by women and improved social outcomes. Women often tend to reinvest their income in their children's education, health and nutrition. This has a positive impact on the potential for economic growth.

India presents lower opportunities for women to assume leadership roles, participation in the workforce or engagement in entrepreneurial activities. Lack of education, technological know-how and cultural bias coupled with stringent business and government regulations are some key impediments that happen to undermine women's ability to rise to positions of leadership and take advantage of entrepreneurial opportunities in India.

Women entrepreneurs have been carving out a niche for them across the globe, including India especially in niche and unconventional businesses. However, there is significant potential to harness the untapped potential of women's entrepreneurship in India.

CABINET APPROVED CAPITAL INFUSION OF RS.2000 CRORE FOR EXPORT CREDIT GUARANTEE

Cabinet has approved the capital infusion of Rs.2000 crore for strengthening of Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (ECGC).

The infusion would enhance insurance coverage to MSME exports and strengthen India's exports to emerging and challenging markets like Africa, CIS and Latin American countries.

With enhanced capital, ECGC's underwriting capacity and risk to capital ratio will improve considerably.

With a stronger underwriting capacity, ECGC will be in a better position to support Indian exporters to tap new and unexplored markets.

Increased capital infusion will help ECGC to diversify its product portfolio and provide cost effective credit insurance helping exporters to gain a stronger foothold in the difficult markets.

Export Credit Guarantee Corporation:

ECGC is a premier export credit agency of the Government of India to provide Export Credit Insurance Services to facilitate exports from the country.

The ECGC offers credit insurance schemes to exporters to protect them against losses due to non-payment of export dues by overseas buyers due to political and / or commercial risks.

UNION CABINET HAS APPROVED ESTABLISHMENT OF ADDITIONAL 6.5 MILLION METRIC TONNE (MMT)

The Union Cabinet has approved establishment of additional 6.5 Million Metric Tonne (MMT) Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) facilities at two locations, i.e. Chandikhol in Odisha and Padur in Karnataka, including construction of dedicated SPMs (Single Point Mooring) for the two SPRs. The SPR facilities at Chandikhol and Padur will be underground rockcaverns and will have capacities of 4 MMT and 2.5 MMT respectively.

SPR programme:

To ensure energy security, the Government of India had decided to set up 5 million metric tons (MMT) of strategic crude oil storages at three locations namely, Visakhapatnam, Mangalore and Padur (near Udupi). These strategic storages would be in addition to the existing storages of crude oil and petroleum products with the oil companies and would serve as a cushion during any external supply disruptions.

To address energy insecurity, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government mooted the concept of strategic petroleum reserves in 1998.

CABINET APPROVES FOR PROCUREMENT OF ETHANOL BY PUBLIC SECTOR OIL MARKETING

Cabinet approves Mechanism for procurement of ethanol by Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) to carry out the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme-Revision of ethanol price for supply to Public Sector OMCs.

Remunerative price to ethanol suppliers will help in reduction of cane farmer's arrears, in the process contributing to minimizing difficulty of sugarcane farmers.

Ethanol availability for EBP Programme is expected to increase significantly due to higher price for C heavy molasses based ethanol and enabling procurement of ethanol from B heavy molasses and sugarcane juice for first time.

Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme:

It was launched by the Government in 2003 on pilot basis which has been subsequently extended to the Notified 21 States and 4 Union Territories to promote the use of alternative and environmental friendly fuels.

It aims at blending ethanol with petrol, thereby bringing it under the category of biofuels and saving millions of dollars by cutting fuel imports.

Ethanol Blended Petrol Programme is being implemented by the Ministry of Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs).

This intervention also seeks to reduce import dependency for energy requirements and give boost to agriculture sector.

There has been a consistent shortfall in supply of ethanol in the past, mainly on account of the cyclical nature of the sugarcane harvests in the country. There is "lack of an integrated approach in the EBP across its value chain."

The National Policy on Bio-fuels has set a target of 20% blending of biofuels, both for bio-diesel and bio-ethanol. This will require an integrated approach in the Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP). The time is ripe for a cogent and consistent policy and administrative framework in the program implementation for the success of EBP.

INDIA ANNOUNCED INCREASE IN FUND FOR THE NEXT FOUR YEARS TO THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

India has announced it will increase for the next four years the money it pays to the Global Environment Facility (GEF), a mechanism to provide grants for environment projects. India will increase its commitments from \$12 million to \$15 million to the GEF's new four-year investment cycle, known as GEF-7.

GEF:

The Global Environment Facility was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems.

It is an international partnership of 183 countries, international institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector that addresses global environmental issues.

GEF funds are available to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to meet the objectives of the international environmental conventions and agreements.

The World Bank serves as the GEF Trustee, administering the GEF Trust Fund.

It is a financial mechanism for five major international environmental conventions: the Minamata Convention on Mercury, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
