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Sikkim Becomes India's Fifth Fully Literate State Under ULLAS

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Sikkim Becomes India's Fifth Fully Literate State Under ULLAS

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WHY IN NEWS:

On **May 28, 2026**, Sikkim was officially declared a **Fully Literate State** under the **ULLAS – Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram** programme of the Ministry of Education. The declaration was made at the **7th Convocation of Sikkim University in Gangtok** in the presence of **President Droupadi Murmu**. Sikkim recorded a **99.82% literacy rate**, surpassing the **95% benchmark** for the 15+ age group set by the Ministry of Education for “Fully Literate” status. Sikkim is the **5th state** and the **6th state/UT** to receive this designation.

WHAT IS ULLAS?

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Full name	Understanding of Lifelong Learning for All in Society (English) / Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram (Hindi)
Launched	2022 (notified by Cabinet under New India Literacy Programme, Feb 2022)
Period	FY 2022–27 (5 years)
Outlay	₹1,037.90 crore (Central + State share 60:40)
Implementing Ministry	Ministry of Education
Target group	Non-literate adults aged 15+
Total target	5 crore non-literate adults by 2027
NEP 2020 anchor	Operationalises Para 21.3 of National Education Policy, 2020 on adult education

THE FIVE PILLARS OF ULLAS

PILLAR	COMPONENT
1	Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) — reading, writing, basic arithmetic
2	Critical Life Skills — financial, digital, legal, health, electoral, family-welfare literacy
3	Vocational Skills — local livelihood orientation
4	Basic Education — preparatory, middle and secondary stage equivalency through NIOS
5	Continuing Education — adult education and life-long learning

SIKKIM — THE NUMBERS

INDICATOR	VALUE
Literacy rate (post-ULLAS)	99.82%
Non-literate adults identified (15+)	15,361
Certified literate via FLNAT	14,447
Sikkim's 2011 Census literacy	81.42% (3rd-highest then; behind Kerala and Mizoram)
Population (2011 Census)	6.10 lakh — India's least populous state

The decisive jump from 81.42% (2011) to 99.82% (2026) reflects 15 years of state-government effort plus the ULLAS push — Sikkim's small population base made saturation feasible.

THE SIX FULLY LITERATE STATES/UTS (IN ORDER OF DECLARATION)

RANK	STATE/UT	DECLARED
1	Mizoram	May 20, 2025
2	Goa	May 2025
3	Tripura	August 2025
4	Himachal Pradesh	November 2025
5	Ladakh (UT)	January 2026
6	Sikkim	May 28, 2026

Sikkim is the **5th state** (after Mizoram, Goa, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh); Ladakh is a UT. All six share two features: **small population + strong administrative penetration.**

THE ASSESSMENT MECHANISM — FLNAT

The **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT)** is conducted by the **National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS)** in partnership with the Ministry of Education. Conducted every **6 months** since March 2024. Pass criteria: **33% in each of three sections** (Reading, Writing, Numeracy) and **33% aggregate.**

NEP 2020 — THE LARGER FRAMEWORK

ULLAS sits within **National Education Policy 2020's** vision of:

- **100% literacy** by 2030.
- **GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio)** in higher education — **50%** by 2035 (from ~28.4% in 2021-22).
- **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy by Grade 3 — NIPUN Bharat Mission (July 2021).**
- **PM SHRI Schools** for exemplar K-12 model schools.

WHY “FULLY LITERATE” STATUS MATTERS

- **Social development indicator** — literacy is a prerequisite for the next-tier outcomes (employment, health-seeking, civic participation).
- **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4)** — Quality Education; India's NDC under SDG.

- **Demographic dividend** — adult literacy is a foundational condition for converting India’s working-age bulge into a productive workforce.
- **Demonstration effect** — small states/UTs leading the way create templates for large states (UP, Bihar, MP, Rajasthan still significantly below the 95% benchmark).

INDIA’S LITERACY TRAJECTORY

YEAR	LITERACY RATE (CENSUS)
1951	18.33%
1991	52.21%
2001	64.83%
2011	74.04%
Census 2027 (projected)	~80%+ (estimate)

The next decadal Census (delayed from 2021, now scheduled for **2026–27 conduct, results 2027–28**) will provide the next reliable national literacy figure.

WIDER SIGNIFICANCE — THE PRESIDENT’S SPEECH

President Murmu, at the Sikkim University convocation, underscored:

- **Education as a public good** rooted in NEP 2020.
- **Northeast as a model** for human-development outcomes.
- **Gender parity in higher education** — women now form ~48% of higher-education enrolment in India.
- **Critical thinking** as the differentiator in the AI age.

WATCHPOINTS

- **Definition concern** — “95% benchmark for 15+” excludes those below 15 and may understate true adult illiteracy if the 5% missed includes the most marginalised.
- **Functional literacy vs basic literacy** — FLNAT tests minimum competence; meaningful “functional literacy” (forms, banking, digital) is a higher bar.
- **Re-lapse into illiteracy** — without continuing education, FLN gains can degrade; ULLAS Pillar 5 must hold.

- **Large states** – UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan need order-of-magnitude scale-up; Sikkim’s playbook doesn’t transfer directly.

WAY FORWARD

- **Targeted ULLAS sub-missions** in low-literacy large states with district-by-district planning.
- **Strong continuing-education infrastructure** – community libraries, digital literacy hubs.
- **Integration with PM-Vidyalakshmi, Skill India, NIOS open schooling** for upward mobility.
- **Tribal and minority-focused FLN modules** in mother-tongue scripts.
- **Census 2027 baseline** – leverage fresh data for ULLAS Phase 2 design.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2 – Social Justice & Governance:

- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.
- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Analytical hooks for Mains:

- Functional vs basic literacy – the next frontier.
- NEP 2020 adult-education pillar – assess implementation gaps.
- Federal-state cooperation in education ([Concurrent List](#)).

FACTS CORNER

Sikkim declared Fully Literate: May 28, 2026 (Sikkim University 7th Convocation, Gangtok).

Sikkim literacy rate: 99.82% (post-ULLAS).

ULLAS launched: 2022; period FY 2022–27.

ULLAS outlay: ₹1,037.90 crore (Centre + State 60:40).

ULLAS target: 5 crore non-literate adults by 2027.

Sikkim non-literate adults certified: 14,447 of 15,361.

Fully Literate States so far: Mizoram, Goa, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim; Ladakh is the lone fully literate UT.

Benchmark: 95%+ literacy for the 15+ age group.

Assessment: FLNAT via NIOS; pass criterion 33% per section + 33% aggregate.

NEP 2020 target: 100% literacy by 2030; higher-education GER 50% by 2035.

National literacy (Census 2011): 74.04%.

NIPUN Bharat Mission: Launched July 2021 (Foundational Literacy and Numeracy by Grade 3).

SDG 4: Quality Education.

Sources: *PIB, Ministry of Education, The Hindu*

Source: [Sikkim Becomes India's Fifth Fully Literate State Under ULLAS](#) — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

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