7.5% Quota for Govt. School Students in MBBS Intake

Why in news?

The Tamil Nadu Cabinet approved an ordinance, envisaging 7.5% horizontal reservation in the State government's quota of MBBS/BDS seats, for students of government higher secondary schools.

What is the long-felt need?

- The decision is a well-intentioned move to address the problem of poor representation from government schools in MBBS/BDS courses.
- This issue has been in existence even prior to the introduction of NEET (National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test).
- The issue of inequity has come in for criticism against NEET which came into operation in Tamil Nadu in 2017.
- Since then, there have been demands against NEET.
- Concerns were raised against the design and form of NEET.
- It was seen as being loaded against students of rural areas, government schools, Backward and Most Backward Classes, and SC/STs.
- Students from the CBSE stream perceivably enjoy greater advantage in NEET than those from the State board.
- Also, most candidates clearing NEET in Tamil Nadu are invariably those who undergo private coaching.
- The Cabinet decision now is based on a recommendation made by a panel in this regard.

What was the panel recommendation?

- It was headed by former judge of the Madras High Court, P. Kalaiyarasan.
- The panel had observed that there was a “cognitive gap” among students studying in government schools.
- It thus suggested that students who had passed the higher secondary exam after having studied for 7 consecutive years in government schools be provided reservation.
- The prerequisite for qualification is that they should have qualified in the NEET.
- The “quota within quota” covers government seats in private colleges too.

How legally sound is the ordinance?

- The proposed ordinance would be sent to the TN Governor Banwarilal Purohit for assent.
- It is unclear whether the horizontal reservation will pass legal scrutiny.
- In 2002, the Madras HC quashed the horizontal quota of 25% in professional courses for higher secondary students from schools in village panchayats.
- However, this time, the State has acted on a panel recommendation.
- Apparently, there is also nothing in NEET's rules against States providing "special reservation" out of their quota of seats.
- This was even articulated, in 2017, by former Union Health Minister J.P. Nadda, in favour of rural students.
- The trend of horizontal reservation is also happening with respect to national law universities for students from the host States.
- In Karnataka too, there is a scheme of horizontal reservation of 15% of State government seats for rural students in admission to professional courses.

What is the way forward?

- It is debatable whether the test of backwardness can be stretched to any extent.
- Nevertheless, the equity principle is important.
- While poor representation in professional courses from the vulnerable sections is a symptom, the causes are deep-rooted.
- Thus, a holistic and sustained approach to improve school education will alone pave the way for a lasting solution.
- Affirmative action must go beyond the search for short-term political dividends and quota politics.

Source: The Hindu

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