Amendments to the NMC Bill

What is the issue?

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- The “National Medical Commission” (NMC) bill was piloted for establishing NMC as the primary medical education regulator in the country.
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- While multiple clauses in the bill faced opposition, the government has now made important changes to the bill.
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What is the NMC bill?

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- Government intends to replace current medical education regulator “Medical Council of India” (MCI) with “National Medical Commission” (NMC).
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- While this the first major reform in medical education since 1956, there was considerable opposition to some of the structural changes proposed.
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- Subsequently, a parliamentary standing committee had suggested about a dozen changes to the bill.
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- The union cabinet has present made 6 changes that will address the most contentious issue in the bill.
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What were the changes ushered in?

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- **The amendments -** The exit exam for doctors that was in the initial draft has now been merged with the final year MBBS exam.
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- The bridge course to enable traditional medical practitioners (AYUSH doctors) to practice Allopathic medicine has now been axed.
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- But interestingly, the current proposal has delegated the freedom for implementing an AYUSH bridge course to the states if they desire to.
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- State representation in the NMC was increased from 3 part-time members to 6, while the parliamentary committee had recommendation for 10.
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- **Retained clauses -** While there were calls for reducing government control over the NMC, the amendments haven't much in this regard.
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- Appointments to NMC will be made by a search committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary, which strongly curtails the body's independence.
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- The bill still retains the central government as the appellate body for those aggrieved by NMC decisions in contrast to the recommendation for constituting an independent authority.
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- Also, the clamour for raising the proportion of "fee regulated seats" in private colleges from 40% to 50% hasn't been approved.
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- Additionally, the no strings attached "fee structure" for unregulated seats could make medical education too costly even for the middle classes.
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How does the future look?

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- Despite the deficiencies, the legislation is promising and will mark the beginning of a new era for medical education in India.
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- Design appropriate sub-rules for implementing the law will also be a challenge due to the vast differences in the medical sector between states.
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- It would be logistically difficult to conduct a common final year MBBS exam as it has to be a comprehensive test rather than a mere multiple choice paper.
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- Lawmakers will have to tackle this gigantic task in a slow and phased manner in order to ensure quality and also enhance number of doctors.
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- The coming days may see more protests against the Bill, perhaps delaying its passage and prompting further discussion.
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Source: The Hindu

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