National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill

Why in news?

The National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill was recently introduced in the Lok Sabha.

What is the Bill about?

- Once the NMC Bill is enacted, the Indian Medical Council Act, 1956, will stand repealed.
- The existing Act provides for the Medical Council of India (MCI), which is the medical education regulator in India.
- An earlier version of this Bill was introduced in the last Lok Sabha. Click here to know more.
- It had passed the scrutiny of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare.
- However, that Bill lapsed at the end of the term of the last Lok Sabha.
- The present Bill has made some changes to the earlier version.

What are the shortfalls with MCI?

- The MCI is primarily intended to producing competent doctors, ensure adherence to medical education quality standards, etc.
- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare examined the functioning of the MCI in its 92nd report (in 2016).
- It noted that the MCI has repeatedly been found short of fulfilling its mandated responsibilities.
- Resultantly, the quality of medical education in India is at its lowest ebb.
- The current medical education model is not producing the right type of health professionals that meet the basic health needs.
- This is because medical education and curricula are not integrated with the needs of the country's health system.
- Those coming out of medical colleges are ill-prepared to serve in poor resource settings like Primary Health Centre and even at the district level.
- Medical graduates lack competence in performing basic health care tasks like conducting normal deliveries.
- Consequently, instances of unethical practice continue to grow and the respect for the profession has diminished.

- Besides these, inefficient individuals have been able to make it to the MCI.
- But, the Ministry is not empowered to remove or sanction a Member of the Council even if s/he has been proved corrupt.

What are the key provisions of the Bill?

- **NMC** - The Bill provides for the constitution of a 25-member NMC to replace the MCI.
- The members will be selected by a search committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary.

- **Advisory Council** - A medical advisory council will advise and make recommendations to the NMC.
- It will include -
    1. one member representing each state and Union Territory (vice-chancellors in both cases)
    2. chairman of the University Grants Commission
    3. director of the National Accreditation and Assessment Council

- **Autonomous boards** - According to the proposed legislation, NMC will have four autonomous boards to regulate the sector.
- These are:
    1. Undergraduate Medical Education Board
    2. Postgraduate Medical Education Board
    3. Medical Assessment and Rating Board
    4. Ethical and Medical Registration Board
- The structure is in accordance with the recommendations of the Group of Experts headed by Ranjit Roy Chaudhury.
- It was set up by the Union Health Ministry to study the norms for the establishment of medical colleges.

- **Test** - The Bill provides for just one medical entrance test across the country, the National Exit Test (NEXT).
- The NEXT would serve as -
    1. the final MBBS exam, which will work as a licentiate examination
    2. the screening test for foreign medical graduates
    3. the screening test for admission to PG medical courses

- [NEXT is different from the NEET which is to be taken before joining UG course.]
- **Fees** - The Bill proposes to regulate the fees and other charges of 50% of the total seats in private medical colleges and deemed universities.

- **Regulation** - The Bill marks a radical change in regulatory philosophy.

- Under the NMC regime, medical colleges will need permission only once - for establishment and recognition.
- There will be no need for annual renewal.
- Also, colleges would be free to increase the number of seats on their own, subject to the present cap of 250.
- They would also be able to start postgraduate courses on their own.
- Fines for violations, however, are steep at 1.5 times to 10 times the total annual fee charged.

What are the key changes in the 2019 Bill?

- There are two key changes, following the recommendations of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare.
- One, the Bill has dropped a separate exit examination.
- Two, it has dropped the provision on a bridge course.
- [It allowed for AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) practitioners to prescribe allopathy medicines after a bridge course.]
- Besides, the Bill has also removed the exemption hitherto given to Central institutions, the AIIMS and JIPMER, from NEET for admission to MBBS and allied courses.
- Notably, there was resentment and a charge of elitism at the exclusion of some institutions from an exam that aimed at standardizing testing.

What lies ahead?

- It is crucial now for the Centre to work amicably with States, and the Indian Medical Association, which is opposed to the Bill.
- At any cost, it must avoid the creation of rigid roadblocks as happened with NEET in some States.

Source: Indian Express, The Hindu

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