Tamil Nadu vs Centre over NEET Bill

Why in news?

Recently, a father-son duo died by suicide in Tamil Nadu after failing the NEET exam twice.

What is NEET?

> *NEET is National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test*

- Indian Medical Council Act states that there shall be a uniform entrance examination to all medical educational institutions at UG level and PG level through such designated authority.
- NEET is based on a core curriculum approach, whereby the syllabi of all the school boards have been taken into consideration.
- It is the only national-level qualifying test for MBBS and BDS programmes in Indian Medical and Dental Universities.
- **Preparation-** It has been prepared by the *Council of Boards of School Education (CBSE), National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)* and adopted by the Medical Council of India.
- **Conducting authority**- *National Testing Agency* will conduct national level qualifying tests.
- **Issue**- NEET has been conducted since 2013. The strong political opposition to the exam was triggered by the suicide of Anitha, a 17-year-old Dalit girl who was a school topper but had been unable to clear NEET in 2017.

> *NTA is an independent, autonomous, and self-sustained premier testing organization established under the Societies Registration Act (1860) by the Ministry of Education*

What is the TamilNadu's stand over NEET bill?

- **Mechanical focus-** NEET's emphasis on marks disregards the importance of student quality and aptitude.
- **Affects educational models-** It has disrupted admired education models like that of Christian Medical College (CMC) Vellore, which emphasised aptitude over marks.
- **Affects federal autonomy-** The introduction of NEET has also dismantled the state's in-service quota for medical graduates in the government sector.
- **Undermines quality healthcare-** Tamil Nadu's health indices were attributed to the earlier system that retained PG doctors.

- The stalemate over NEET captures the struggle to balance uniformity and fairness with specific needs and values of a diverse society.
- **Impacts equity education-** It is alleged that only kids from affluent families who can afford coaching are being aided by NEET.
- Hence it raises entry barrier for underprivileged students and undermines equity in education.
- It also alleged that having a central level exam when syllabus varies from state to state is unfair and puts students under a lot of pressure.
- **Frequent suicides**- The state registers around 16 death by suicides due to failure in NEET exams.
- **State as competent authority**- It is said the state was the competent authority to regulate admissions for underprivileged social groups, as *medical courses were traceable to the provisions of the Constitution*.

Pass Percentage in Tamil Nadu - 2023
• The overall pass percentage of the state is 54.45%. • From the available data, the pass percentage of private school students is around 56%. • The pass percentage of government school students has improved to 30.6% from 27% last year. Source – New Indian Express

What steps were taken by Tamil Nadu against NEET?

- **Bills for state autonomy**
  - The Tamil Nadu Admission to MBBS and BDS Courses Bill 2017
  - The Tamil Nadu Admission to Postgraduate Courses in Medicine and Dentistry Bill, 2017
- Both sought state autonomy in medical admissions, focusing on board examination scores for UG courses and undergraduate marks for PG courses, but both the bills were returned by President.
- **A K Rajan Committee-** It is constituted to examine whether NEET was an equitable method to select candidates for admission to medical courses.
- **Key findings of the report**-
  - NEET disproportionately benefited repeaters (71% in 2021) and coached students (99% in 2020), and discriminated against first-time applicants.
  - It noted a 50% decline in seat share in backward districts after the introduction of NEET, and an increased representation from urban centres such as Chennai.
  - Admissions fell among first-generation graduates, rural applicants, and candidates with small parental incomes
  - While the rural students maintained an average of 61.45% in the pre-NEET admission, it fell down to 49.91% in 2020-21 after NEET was introduced.
  - Urban students who fared 38.55% average in the pre-NEET rose to 50.09% in 2020-21 in the post-NEET.
- **Recommendations of the report**
  - It supported the state's stance of NEET not being the ideal way of admissions.
  - NEET undermined societal diversity and favoured the affluent in medical education.

    - The committee recommended immediate steps to eliminate it through the passage of suitable legislation.
- **Anti NEET Bill-** Tamil Nadu Admission to Undergraduate Medical Degree Courses Bill, 2021 was passed in Tamil Nadu to dispense with NEET and allow admission to medical courses based on Class 12 marks.
- It is one of the recommendations of A.K.Rajan Committee.
- Governor didn't give assent for the bill and cited the Supreme Court decision that upheld NEET.
- Governor returned the bill to the state government. The Assembly readopted the Bill within days, and the Governor subsequently forwarded the Bill to the President.
- State CM M.K.Stalin writes open letter to President seeking assent to NEET Exemption Bill.

Article 200*- Every Bill passed in an Assembly has to be sent to the Governor, after which he has 4 options — assent the Bill, withhold assent, reserve the Bill for President or return the Bill to the legislature for reconsideration.*

References

1. Indian Express- Equity and federalism battle over NEET Bill
2. Indian Express- State CM writes open letter to President

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