Widening SC Scholarship Net

Why in news?

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The Centre proposed to raise the income eligibility criteria for government scholarship schemes related to Scheduled Caste students.

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What changes have been proposed?

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- Under the **'Top Class Education Scheme'**, the Centre provides scholarships to SC students who are pursuing higher education at IITs, IIMs, NITs, commercial pilot training institutes, medical/ law/ media and other reputed institutes.
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- According to the current eligibility criteria, their parents' annual income shouldn't exceed Rs 4.5 lakh.
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- The annual income of the parents is now proposed to be revised to Rs 6 lakh per annum.
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- The funding, available in 175 notified top institutes, covers much of the expenses incurred towards fees, living expenses, books and computer.
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- The **pre-matric scholarship** is aimed at minimising the incidence of Dalit students dropping out in Class IX-X, while **post-matric assistance** is meant to enable such students to complete their higher education.
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- For pre-matric scholarships for SC students, the annual income is proposed to be revised from Rs 2 lakh to Rs 2.5 lakh, on par with the eligibility criteria for post-matric scholarships.
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- The basic eligibility criterion for our **National Overseas Scholarship** for SC students is that their parents' annual salary should not exceed Rs 6 lakh.
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- These changes are part of the plans for 'rationalisation of all scholarship

schemes', to correct the wide variation in income criteria, said officials.
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- The ministry is also looking at revising the varying income criteria, as well as the scholarship amount, for other schemes for students from SC, OBC, and economically backward communities.
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- For instance, post-matric scholarship for SC students, last revised in 2010, specifies that the parents' annual income should not exceed Rs 2.5 lakh.
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- But for OBC pre-matric scholarships, only students whose parents earn less than Rs 45,000 per annum are eligible.
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What are the realties in scholarship allocation?

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- Data from the ministry shows arrears of over Rs 5,500 crore in the popular post-matric SC scholarship scheme, with a majority of students not having received any money for two years now.
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- The scheme, which catered to 46 lakh students in 2016-17, has seen only a marginal increase in allocation which is not even enough to cover the pending dues.
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- Officials from the ministry said the decrease in allocation is because as per scheme guidelines, the states are expected to pool in funds.
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- However, many states have complained that they do not have the enough resources.
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- As for the arrears, officials blamed it on the steep fees charged by many private institutions.
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Source: The Indian Express

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