



Gap in India's supply of quality education against the demand

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(Mains 2 : Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.)

Context:

It is estimated that around 20,000 Indian students (Majority of medical students) were stranded in Ukraine; thus, the work of the Union government, complemented by the efforts of some active State governments, is aimed at bringing our fellow citizens back home.

Soaring demand:

- For centuries, from Mahatma Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar and Jawaharlal Nehru to Amartya Sen and Manmohan Singh, Indians have gone abroad to pursue higher education.
- Before the onset of the pandemic, more than 7,50,000 Indian students were studying abroad, spending \$24 billion in foreign economies, which is around 1% of India's GDP.
- The number is expected to rise to around 1.8 million by 2024 when our students will be spending nearly \$80 billion outside India.
- With more than half the Indian population under the age of 25, and no Indian university in the world's top 100, it is natural that aspirational students would look to study abroad.

Aspirants are more than seats:

- There are far more MBBS aspirants than there are MBBS seats in India as in NEET 2021, as per a National Testing Agency press release, 16.1 lakh students registered for the exam, 15.4 lakh students appeared for the test, and 8.7 lakh students qualified.
- Bharati Pravin Pawar, Union Minister of State for Health, told the Lok Sabha in December 2021, that as per data from the National Medical Commission (NMC), in 2021-22, there were 596 medical colleges in the country with a total of 88,120 MBBS seats.
- While the skew is in favour of Government colleges, the number of private medical institutions is nearly neck-to-neck with the state-run ones.
- The costs of an MBBS degree in a Government college tot up to a few lakhs of rupees for the full course, but in a private medical college, it can go up to ₹1 crore for the five-year course.

Preferred countries:

- For about three decades now, Indian students have been heading out to Russia, China, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, the Philippines to pursue a medical degree.
- The medium of education for these students is English, a language they are comfortable with, and the amount spent on living and the medical degree are far more affordable than paying for an MBBS seat in private medical colleges in the country.
- The desire to study medicine still holds a lot of value in the Indian community and lack of equal opportunities exacerbated by the caste factor in the Indian context, has a great deal of impact on the prestige still associated with being a doctor.

Paramount importance:

- The unfortunate deaths of two Indian students in Ukraine warrant serious intervention though it can be argued that what is happening in Ukraine is an external armed aggression and so chaos is expected.
- Given a proper ecosystem, Indian students can significantly contribute to India's development by transferring advanced knowledge and best practices.
- They are consumers of higher education abroad, and guests of the nations they reside in as it is only natural then for us to mandate protection of our people abroad by ensuring that host countries take on this responsibility.
- International agreements that oblige host countries to ensure the welfare of Indian students during times of crises and contingencies should be given paramount importance.

Towards solution:

- According to the experts, if the aim is to make medicine more accessible to students of the country, the path ahead is not in the private sector, but in the public sector, with the Central and State governments' involvement.
- Starting private medical colleges by reducing the strict standards set for establishing institutes may not actually be the solution to this problem.
- Rather, creating more medical colleges will be beneficial for the country, if access and availability can be ensured by utilizing district headquarters hospitals and expanding their infrastructure.
- Further for the safety of students abroad, a mandatory student insurance scheme as well as responsibility for the welfare of students in the foreign country should be incorporated into agreements to secure the interests of students who also spend considerably in the host country.