

Centre extends scholarship for J&K, Ladakh students

UPA govt. introduced scheme in 2011 to give funds to 5,000 students and promote job opportunities

VIJAITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Union government has extended a scholarship scheme from the United Progressive Alliance era for students from Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh for another five years in the wake of the encouraging response it has received. The government wants to continue the scholarship along with a simultaneous focus on opening new educational institutes in the newly created Union Territories.

The Prime Minister's Special Scholarship Scheme (PMSSS) was introduced by the Congress-led UPA government in 2011 to provide funding to 5,000 meritorious students each year to study in private and government educational institutions across the country. Aimed at promoting employment opportunities for students from J&K and Ladakh, the scheme, with an annual budget of ₹180 crore to ₹190 crore, is implemented by the



Future prospects: The scheme offers 4,500 seats for general education courses and 250 seats each for engineering and medical courses. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE).

According to AICTE data, there was a substantial increase in the number of applications received in the academic years 2020-21 and 2021-22, following a dip in 2018-19 and 2019-20. The rise was recorded after J&K's special status granted under Article 370 of the Constitution was revoked by Parliament in August 2019.

Anil D. Sahasrabudhe, Chairman, AICTE, told *The Hindu* that the term of the scheme was due to end last year, but the Central government decided to extend it for another five years for the benefit of students.

Mr. Sahasrabudhe said the scheme offers 4,500 seats for general education courses (Bachelor's in Arts, Commerce and Science), and 250 each for engineer-

ing and medical degrees. While the scholarship offered for general education courses is ₹1.3 lakh, including a ₹1 lakh maintenance fee to cover hostel and mess charges, it is ₹2.25 lakh for engineering and ₹4 lakh for medical degrees.

'Few takers'

"There are not many takers for general education seats. When these seats are not filled, they are converted on a pro rata basis into engineering and medical seats, raising the 500-seat limit. The ₹1 lakh maintenance fee is common for all courses. So, three unoccupied general education seats are equivalent to one medical seat and 1.8 engineering seats," Mr. Sahasrabudhe said. He added that the conversion rate is different each year and that is why all 5,000 seats are never filled.

However, data showed that in the past six years, the 250 allotted medical seats were not filled. In 2020-21,

only 113 students joined the medical stream through the PMSSS. In 2019-20, only 95 students opted for medicine under the scheme.

While there were 25,970 and 24,455 applicants for the scholarship in 2020-21 and 2021-22, respectively, and 23,234 and 22,538 of them met the eligibility criteria, only 4,780 and 4,095 students finally joined colleges under the scheme.

Opting out

He said the reasons for students opting out of the scheme include securing admission in a college of their choice in J&K or Ladakh, feeling homesick, and concerns over the language barrier. However, he said such seats do not remain vacant as they are opened for diploma holders in the following academic year. "If after Class 10, a student has pursued a diploma, then he or she may gain admission directly to the second year of engineering," Mr. Sahasrabudhe said.