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# TN not exempt from NEET, but can give quota for rural students

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**Chennai:** There will be no escape for any state, including Tamil Nadu, from holding the common National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to medical and dental colleges this year, Union health minister **J P Nadda** declared here on Saturday.

States, including Tamil Nadu, can, however, frame a reservation policy to accommodate students from the state board or rural areas, he told reporters outside the airport. NEET this year will be conducted on May 7.

On January 31, health minister C Vijayabaskar had moved two bills in the assembly, seeking to exclude Tamil Nadu from NEET for admis-

sion to undergraduate and post-graduate medical and dental courses. Last month, a team of ministers and senior health officials from TN met Nadda, law minister Ravi Shankar and HRD minister Prakash Javadekar seeking the same exemption. This week, admission process for PG courses based on NEET scores has begun.



Since his visit Vijayabaskar had been saying he was hopeful of getting the exemption this year, but Nadda categorically ruled out any such favours.

"Tamil Nadu feels students from a rural background will not be able to adjust to the NEET admission process. The state will have full freedom to have its own reservation policy for students of the state board or

for those hailing from a rural background," he said.

Although he did not elaborate, senior state health department officials said this could mean the state can give grace marks to select group of students apart from the 69% rule of reservation. "But it may be impossible to do it arbitrarily. Many rural areas in Namakkal and Rasipuram have schools that produce students with top ranks in Class XII," said an official.

In 2004, the state decided to admit students to MBBS and BDS courses on the basis of Class XII marks as the bulk of students appearing for the uniform examination came from rural areas and due to economic conditions struggle to access coaching class to equip themselves for the examination.