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## Consider holding NEET-UG exam online next year: SC

ASHISH TRIPATHI  
NEW DELHI, DHNS

The Supreme Court on Monday asked the National Testing Agency (NTA) and the Medical Council of India to consider organising NEET-UG exam online from next year for admission to medical colleges across the country.

A bench presided over by Justice L Nageswara Rao asked the authorities to think about holding online examinations like the IIT-JEE.

The court broached the idea while refusing to issue any direction for setting up NEET-UG 2020 examinations centres across Middle East and other gulf countries to facilitate students from the foreign countries.

The court, however, allowed the students to approach the state government for relaxing 14 days quarantine norms for students coming from abroad by Vande Bharat flights.

A petition by Abdul Azeez questioned the validity of Kerala High Court's order of June 30, that dismissed the plea for direction to the Centre to establish examination centres abroad. The petitioner said the students studying abroad would be adversely affected by the decision.

The central government's decision to conduct the NEET-UG 2020 examination on September 13 amidst the Covid-19 pandemic was a risky decision with the future of expatriate students.

### COVID-19 Tracker

States/UT	Active	Infected	Death	Daily cases	Daily deaths
Maharashtra	1,68,126	6,93,398	22,465	11,015	212
Andhra Pradesh	89,516	3,61,712	3,368	8,601	86
Karnataka	81,211	2,83,665	4,810	5,851	127
Tamil Nadu	53,282	3,85,352	6,614	5,967	97
Uttar Pradesh	49,288	1,92,382	2,987	4,601	61
West Bengal	27,694	1,41,837	2,851	2,967	57
Bihar	21,394	1,23,383	627	1,227	17
Telangana	22,919	1,06,091	761	1,842	6
Odisha	24,082	81,479	419	2,949	10
Assam	21,468	92,620	252	1,880	10
Others	1,67,393	8,23,944	13,940	13,185	165

7,04,979

TOTAL ACTIVE  
CASES

23,98,645

TOTAL  
RECOVERED

31,62,480

TOTAL  
INFECTED

58,467

TOTAL DEATHS

389

NON-COVID DEATHS\*

DHNS/PTI (10 PM,  
August 24)

\*Patients dead due to  
non-Covid reasons

## Postpone JEE and NEET: Didi

KOLKATA, DHNS: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday urged the Centre to postpone JEE and NEET owing to the pandemic.

Referring to the Education Ministry's decision of conducting the JEE and NEET in September, she said first "safe environment" for students must be ensured. She also said during her last video conference with the prime minister she expressed her opposition against the UGC guidelines mandating completion of terminal examinations by the end of September.



# 'Consider online NEET from next year'

SC refuses to order authorities to set up centres abroad; entrance exam fixed for September 13

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Medical Council of India (MCI) to consider providing an online option for taking the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance (NEET) from next year.

"If Joint Entrance Examination [JEE] is allowed online, why not NEET? It is the same National Testing Agency [NTA] conducting both exams. Why can't you think of something next year... You can think about it," Justice L. Nageswara Rao, heading a three-judge Bench, orally addressed MCI counsel Gaurav Sharma during the virtual court hearing.

But the court refused to order authorities to set up exam centres abroad or have the NEET held online this year to facilitate candidates abroad, especially those in West Asia.



The entrance exam is fixed for September 13.

"Unless there is something arbitrary, how can we pass orders? You [candidates] live in Dubai, you have studied there. You want to come to India to write NEET, who is stopping you... Take the Vande Bharat flights. This year it is too late," Justice Rao said.

Advocate Haris Beeran, representing the interests of the candidates, said it was hard for students to travel to India amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides, they would be quarantined once

they reach here.

In response, the court said there was still enough time to take a Vande Bharat flight to India and complete quarantine here. The court requested Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta to consider facilitating travel for NEET candidates in these flights.

## Quarantine norms

The court refused to order easing of quarantine norms for NEET candidates coming from abroad.

Both the court and the Centre said the fixing of a quarantine period was en-

tirely the prerogative of the State.

Mr. Beeran had said the quarantine in some places in Kerala extended to 28 days.

"We have to take care of the health and welfare of the public too. Mr. Beeran, you are in Kerala? There are 2,500 cases reported every day... Tell them [candidates] to catch the flights now itself and write the exams here. There are still days left," said Justice Rao.

The court, however, acquiesced to Mr. Beeran's plea that students could approach the respective State governments to relax quarantine.

Mr. Beeran had argued that a large number of students were appearing for both the JEE and the NEET. It would be impossible for these students to take the JEE, which is held between September 1 to September 6,

fly to India, observe quarantine and then appear physically for the NEET on September 13.

"Sixty percent of students who take the NEET are also aspirants of the JEE. The JEE has both online and exam centres in various places, including Dubai and Doha," the lawyer submitted.

But Justice Rao reasoned that only a "miniscule" number of candidates appeared for both the exams.

"People who write the NEET would be from the medical branch of studies like physics, chemistry and biology... A large number of people start preparing for the NEET when they are studying in Class 10 or earlier," he observed orally.

The court said the petition had not shown any arbitrariness in the conduct of the NEET. Hence the scope of judicial review was limited.