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**TOPIC**

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**PAPER LEAKS IN INDIA &  
INSTITUTIONAL GAPS**

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## PAPER LEAKS IN INDIA & INSTITUTIONAL GAPS

### Context

- The recent cancellation of the **National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test Undergraduate (NEET-UG) 2026** following allegations of a paper leak has exposed serious weaknesses in India's examination governance system, and restoring credibility to the system has become a national priority.

### Major Causes of Paper Leaks in India

- Paper leaks refer to the unauthorised disclosure of examination question papers before the test, compromising fairness, merit, and public trust.
  - ♦ They have emerged as a major governance and institutional challenge in India's examination system.
- **High-Stakes Examination System:** India's entrance and recruitment exams involve millions of candidates competing for limited seats or jobs.
  - ♦ Examples: NEET, JEE, CUET, SSC, Railway Recruitment Exams, and State Public Service Commission exams.
  - ♦ This intense competition creates incentives for organised cheating networks.
- **Weak Institutional Capacity:** Many examination bodies suffer from poor administrative planning, inadequate staffing, lack of professional expertise, and weak coordination among agencies.
  - ♦ Large-scale examinations require sophisticated management systems, which are often absent.
- **Insider Collusion:** Paper leaks frequently involve insiders such as printing press employees, examination officials, invigilators, IT staff, and transport personnel.
  - ♦ Internal access makes question papers vulnerable before the examination begins.
- **Poor Cybersecurity and Technological Gaps:** With increasing digitalisation, examination systems face risks like hacking, server breaches, data theft, and malware attacks.
  - ♦ Question papers stored or transmitted electronically become vulnerable if encryption and cybersecurity measures are weak.
- **Organised Cheating Networks:** Criminal syndicates operate sophisticated paper leak rackets involving coaching centres, middlemen, cyber experts, and corrupt officials.
  - ♦ These networks sell leaked papers for huge amounts of money.
- **Lack of Secure Examination Infrastructure:** Several examination centres lack CCTV surveillance, biometric verification, secure internet systems, and standardised procedures.
  - ♦ Weak infrastructure increases opportunities for malpractice.
- **Inadequate Monitoring and Audits:** Many examination agencies do not conduct independent security audits, real-time monitoring, surprise inspections, and end-to-end tracking of question papers.
  - ♦ This weak oversight enables leaks to go unnoticed until after the examination.
- **Delayed Legal Enforcement:** Although laws exist, punishment is often delayed due to slow investigations, weak prosecution, and lack of coordination between agencies.
  - ♦ Low conviction rates reduce deterrence.
- **Coaching Culture and Commercialisation:** The massive coaching industry creates excessive pressure to succeed, and commercial incentives for unethical practices.
  - ♦ Some coaching networks allegedly become linked to leak syndicates.
- **Over-Centralisation of Examinations:** National-level exams involving millions of candidates across India concentrate risk in one system.
  - ♦ A single breach can affect entire examinations, admissions, and recruitment processes nationwide.

### Why Does NEET Matters?

- **Extreme Competition and Limited Seats:** NEET is the gateway to medical education in India. Around more than **2 million students** appear annually, and compete for roughly **120,000 MBBS seats**.
  - ♦ It creates a severe demand-supply mismatch.

### Consequences of Seat Scarcity

- **Rise of Coaching Culture:** Students spend years preparing through expensive coaching institutes. Families often invest life savings in preparation.
- **Psychological Pressure:** Intense competition increases stress, anxiety, and mental health issues. Student suicides linked to examination pressure remain a serious concern.
- **Medical Education Abroad:** Thousands of Indian students pursue MBBS degrees in countries such as Russia, Ukraine, China, and the Philippines due to insufficient affordable seats domestically.

### Government Measures & Their Significance

- **Expansion of Medical Seats:** The Union government has announced the addition of **75,000 medical seats over five years**.
  - ♦ It is significant because it can improve doctor-population ratio, reduce excessive competition, lower dependence on foreign medical education, and ease financial pressure on families.
  - ♦ However, seat expansion alone cannot solve systemic governance failures in examinations.
- **National Testing Agency (NTA):** It was established in 2017 as **an autonomous and specialised testing body** under the Ministry of Education.
  - ♦ Its mandate was to conduct transparent and standardised examinations, use scientific and technology-driven assessment methods, reduce irregularities in entrance examinations, and create a globally benchmarked testing ecosystem.
  - ♦ It currently conducts major examinations such as NEET-UG, JEE Main, CUET-UG, and UGC-NET.
- **Radhakrishnan Committee Recommendations:** The Union government constituted a high-level committee headed by **former ISRO chairman K. Radhakrishnan** following the NEET 2024 controversy.
  - ♦ The committee reportedly made **101 recommendations**, including encrypted digital transmission of question papers, AI-based monitoring systems, standardised examination centres, stronger CCTV surveillance, enhanced cybersecurity, staff training and accountability mechanisms.
  - ♦ However, only partial implementation has reportedly taken place.
- **Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024:** The Act introduced stringent penalties up to **10 years imprisonment**, and fine up to **₹1 crore**.
  - ♦ It hasn't worked because of weak enforcement capacity, organised cheating networks, insider collusion, poor monitoring systems, and delayed investigations.
  - ♦ It shows that punitive laws alone cannot ensure examination integrity without institutional reform.

### Way Forward

- **Institutional Restructuring of NTA:** The NTA requires comprehensive reform through professional and permanent staffing, independent oversight mechanisms, transparent audit systems, and greater operational decentralisation.
- **Technological Safeguards:** India needs to strengthen end-to-end encryption of question papers, AI-driven anomaly detection, biometric verification, and real-time cybersecurity monitoring.
- **Decentralised Operational Capacity:** A hybrid model involving central standard-setting, and state-level logistical execution can improve responsiveness and reduce administrative overload.
- **Mental Health and Student Welfare:** Examination reforms need to include counselling support, reduced examination pressure, multiple testing opportunities, and transparent grievance redressal systems.

- **Expanding Educational Capacity:** Long-term reform requires more medical colleges, affordable higher education, and better public investment in health and education infrastructure.
  - ◆ Reducing scarcity will reduce the disproportionate burden attached to a single examination.

#### Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] Discuss the major causes behind paper leaks in India. Examine the institutional gaps responsible for such failures and suggest measures to restore credibility, transparency, and accountability in public examinations.

Source: BS

