

## **Leak of question papers of NEET indicates how deep crime and corruption have penetrated in education system**



*Kolkata*

On 3 May 2026, the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), India’s unified, nationwide entrance examination for undergraduate medical programmes, was conducted. In the following days, social media was flooded with reels by students celebrating the end of months, years, of relentless preparation. The examination had been taken by over 900,000 candidates across more than 300 cities.

Barely two weeks later, that sense of relief had curdled into despair. On 12 May, the National Testing Agency (NTA), India’s nodal body for conducting higher education entrance examinations, announced the cancellation of NEET 2026 following widespread allegations of the circulation of a “guess paper” and multiple accusations of irregularities in the original examination. Since then, at least four students have died by suicide, driven by despair.

The cancellation of NEET-UG 2026 following allegations of question paper leakage in Rajasthan and the ordering of a CBI probe have once again exposed the deep crisis surrounding centrally conducted high-stakes examinations in the country. For the past several years, serious allegations regarding leaks, irregularities, manipulation, and malpractice in various central examinations have surfaced repeatedly. In fact, over the last five years, data indicates that at least 41 major government recruitment exam papers were leaked across 15 Indian states. When factoring in national competitive entrance and state-level exams, analysts estimate that between 70 and 89 paper leaks have occurred across India in recent years.

Things are **also severe** in state examinations. Question papers for various local government recruitment exams are frequently leaked amid fierce competition for jobs in an economy where most positions are largely informal, insecure, and low-paying. Recruitment examinations for policemen, foresters, engineers, veterinarians and income-tax inspectors have been affected by leaks in the past. Things have been so bad that paper leaks became a hot-button issue in states like Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan during recent elections. The governments of all these states are run by the BJP.

One would recall that in 2015, the most audacious exam cheating scandal rocked Vyapam, (Vyavsayik Pareeksha Mandal) or the MP Professional Examination Board, a government office in Madhya Pradesh overseeing more than 50 exams for government jobs and local medical colleges. From 2009 onwards it came to light that these competitive examinations and appointments in various government services and professions including medical profession were and are being rigged in exchange of huge amount of money to favour candidates recommended by or close to ministers including BJP chief minister of the state, ruling party leaders of the state or elsewhere, RSS- BJP big-wigs, bureaucrats across the board, as well as the office of the Governor.

Question papers were leaked, answer sheets rigged, impersonators - themselves bright, young students - were hired to sit for candidates and seats were sold to the highest bidder. Complicit teachers filled incomplete sheets, boosting grades. Though originally it was told that the amount believed to have been exchanged as bribes in this scandal was around Rs 2000 crore, later it was revealed that the figure was as high as Rs 36,000 crore. During these few years of investigation, there had been at

least 48 unnatural deaths of accused persons, witnesses, government approvers, probing officials- professors-deans or investigating journalists, media persons and whistleblowers. All these deaths took place in suspicious circumstances. It showed that the network of the offenders was not only strong but even connected with powers who can orchestrate such assassinations with ease and proficiency. In fact, with unfolding of Vyapam scam, the Vyapam and other scams BJP's claim of corruption free country tumbled with a hard splash. From then onwards, paper leak has been a normal affair.

It bears recall that only in February 2024, the government passed a law titled Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024. to stop the leakage of question papers and cheating in recruitment and entrance tests. Despite such a law, question papers continue to be out before examinations. For the last two months, Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan has at least thrice denied that there was any evidence of a paper leak in the controversial NEET-UG exam, going on to suggest that no paper was in fact leaked in the last seven years. This was stated despite the Supreme Court's observation that there were leaks in Hazaribagh and Patna. The education ministry initially put out a cryptic statement saying the *"integrity of the examination may have been compromised"*. A day later, the education minister admitted the question paper had been leaked on social media platform Telegram and on the "dark net". It shows a sense of denial to crimes and malpractices seems to drape the BJP government's response to the issue despite disquiet in the streets and in parliament.

It goes without saying that those capable of breaching "secure" examination system are not ordinary individuals. Such organized crime cannot happen without involvement of influential people, corrupt administration and highly placed networks. If every time the real culprits are protected or investigations remain inconclusive, how can students and guardians continue to trust the sanctity of NEET and other central examinations? Truth is that an education system has been created in the country which encourages, if not promotes, such frauds and malpractices with crores of rupees changing hands.

Many students and parents are demanding a re-test, with numerous petitions filed in courts for the purpose – and the Supreme Court is examining this. The Union education minister, after much dilly dally, has ordered an investigation and admitted

*“some errors limited to specific regions”* had happened. He said the fate of millions of aspirants would not be held hostage for “some isolated incidents”. Incredible indeed! Recurrence of a crime that is playing sixes and sevens with the future of the students is brushed aside as some localized errors.

AIDSO in a statement dated 12-05-26 said that the cancellation of NEET-UG 2026 following allegations of question paper leakage in Rajasthan and the ordering of a CBI probe have once again exposed the deep crisis surrounding centrally conducted high-stakes examinations in the country. AIDSO strongly condemned the repeated failures of NTA, the nodal agency which conducts the examinations, to ensure a fair, transparent, and secure examination process and demanded its scrapping forthwith. AIDSO also held that these repeated failure of a deeply flawed and highly centralized examination system increasingly serves the interests of the mushrooming coaching industry generating enormous psychological, financial, and academic stress upon students and their families. This extreme corruption is a result of growing privatization of medical education and ingress of large-scale corruption in the academic sphere. AIDSO called upon students, guardians, teachers, and all democratic minded people to raise a united voice against the continuous irregularities and insecurity surrounding central examinations and to build up a countrywide united students’ movement demanding a fair, democratic, and reliable education and examination system.