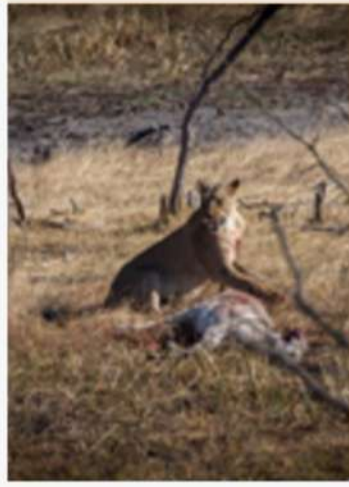


THE PALA CIVIL TIMES

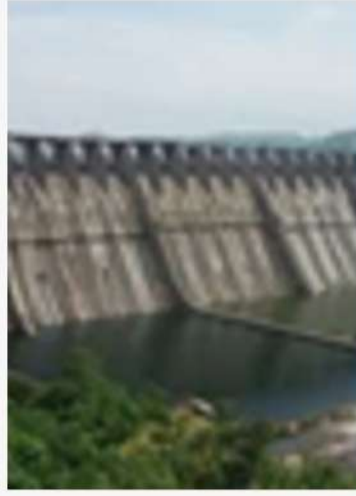


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NEET-UG cancelled: Why this is a first, what happened in past paper leak cases

THE INDIAN EXPRESS
13-05-2026 : Explained



NEET-UG 2026 cancelled

The National Testing Agency (NTA) has cancelled the May 3 National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (Undergraduate) [NEET-UG] after evidence of a question paper leak emerged. Nearly 22 lakh students who appeared for the examination, the gateway to undergraduate medical admissions across India, will now have to take a re-test, which the NTA plans to conduct within the shortest possible time without requiring fresh registration or additional fees. The controversy surfaced after a whistleblower complaint on May 7 led investigators to a handwritten "guess paper" that reportedly matched several questions from the actual exam. Following the developments, the Central Bureau of Investigation has registered a case to probe the leak, while police investigations have already led to arrests linked to the alleged malpractice. The NTA stated that CCTV footage from examination strongrooms is being examined and that the exact source of the leak will be determined through the ongoing investigation.

(Read the full report on Page 2)

PRELIMS CORNER

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Delhi Sultanate

Mughal Administration

UPSC PYQ analysis -
Medieval India

EDITORIALS DECODED

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Data and justice

As courts adopt AI, care must be taken on the potential for abuse



NEET leak unacceptable: Who's accountable?



Poison in the food

India needs cogent policy to regulate pesticide use

NEET-UG cancelled: Why this is a first, what happened in past paper leak cases

The National Testing Agency cancelled the NEET-UG 2026 examination conducted on May 3 for around 22.05 lakh candidates, citing investigative findings related to alleged malpractices and paper leaks. This is the first time the entire NEET-UG exam has been cancelled.

National Testing Agency

- NTA was established in **2017**.
- It became operational in **2018**.
- It functions as an **autonomous testing organization** under the **Ministry of Education**.
- The agency was created to conduct standardized entrance examinations across the country.
- It conducts major exams such as **NEET-UG, JEE Main, UGC-NET, and CUET**.

Nature of Allegations

Allegations in NEET-UG 2026 included the circulation of a PDF allegedly containing exam questions and the discovery of a “guess paper” by the Rajasthan Special Operations Group, following which the National Testing Agency cancelled the examination and announced a re-test without fresh registration or additional fees. Earlier, the NEET-UG 2024 controversy involved alleged paper leaks in Jharkhand and Bihar, but the Supreme Court refused cancellation, stating that available material did not indicate a “systemic leak” affecting the sanctity of the entire examination.

K. Radhakrishnan Committee

- The Central Government constituted a seven-member committee in 2024 to suggest reforms for the smooth and secure conduct of public examinations.
- The committee was headed by **K. Radhakrishnan**.
- It submitted its recommendations to the Ministry of Education at the end of 2024.
- The committee compared examination management with the conduct of **elections** and recommended stronger security mechanisms.
- It suggested sealing examination centres in the presence of district authorities and police until the exam begins.
- The committee recommended greater coordination between the National Testing Agency, state governments, and district administrations.
- It emphasized the use of Computer-Based Testing (CBT) and multiple exam shifts for better security and management.
- The recommendations also supported measures such as biometric verification, CCTV surveillance, GPS-enabled transport of question papers, and centralized monitoring systems.

National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test

- The National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (UG)/NEET-UG is conducted for admission to undergraduate medical courses in India.
- It replaced the All India Pre-Medical/Pre-Dental Test (AIPMT) in 2016.
- The examination was conducted by the CBSE till 2018.
- It has been conducted by the National Testing Agency since 2019.
- NEET-UG is conducted in pen-and-paper mode.
- It is the largest single-day examination conducted by the NTA.

Broader issues

Crisis of Institutional Trust : The cancellation reflects declining public trust in competitive examination systems, which play a major role in educational mobility, employment opportunities, and social justice outcomes.

Scale versus Security Challenge : NEET involves more than 22 lakh candidates, thousands of examination centres, and multiple administrative layers, making exam management highly complex. Key challenges include secure logistics, maintaining personnel integrity, coordination across states, and preventing digital leaks.

Cooperative Federalism in Examination Governance : K. Radhakrishnan committee recommendations emphasize coordination between the National Testing Agency, district administrations, police authorities, and state governments as large public examinations require cooperative federalism and cannot rely solely on centralized agencies.

Technology and Examination Integrity : Measures such as biometric verification, GPS-enabled transport, CCTV surveillance, and centralized monitoring have been introduced to improve security. However, concerns regarding digital leaks, darknet circulation, and organized cheating networks still persist.

The controversy highlights the need for stronger structural reforms such as secure digital architecture, better personnel vetting, independent audit systems, stronger anti-cheating laws, and examination-specific cyber intelligence mechanisms.

How India is governing its water resources

The National Testing Agency cancelled the NEET-UG 2026 examination conducted on May 3 for around 22.05 lakh candidates, citing investigative findings related to alleged malpractices and paper leaks. This is the first time the entire NEET-UG exam has been cancelled.

India's Water Crisis

- India receives nearly 4,000 billion cubic metres (BCM) of annual rainfall, but only a fraction is effectively captured and utilised.
- India supports nearly one-fifth of the world's population but has access to only about 4% of global freshwater resources.
- According to the NITI Aayog Composite Water Management Index, around 600 million people face high to extreme water stress.
- Although total water availability is high, only about 1,100 BCM is considered usable due to storage limitations, uneven rainfall distribution, and ecological constraints.
- Per-capita water availability in India has declined from more than 5,000 cubic metres after Independence to around 1,400 cubic metres today.
- India is the world's largest groundwater user and accounts for nearly one-fourth of global groundwater extraction.

Major Water-Related Schemes in India

Jal Jeevan Mission (2019) :

- Launched to provide functional tap water connections to rural households and extended till 2028 for universal coverage.
- Initiatives such as "Sujalam Bharat", "Jal Arpan", and "Jal Utsav" aim to improve transparency, accountability, and community ownership.

Atal Bhujal Yojana :

- Launched in 2020 for sustainable groundwater management through a participatory and community-based approach.
- The scheme is implemented in water-stressed Gram Panchayats across seven States with World Bank support and a total outlay of ₹6000 crore.

Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) :

- Launched in 2015-16 to expand assured irrigation coverage and improve on-farm water use efficiency.
- It promotes micro-irrigation, water conservation practices, and efficient agricultural water management.
- Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme (AIBP) set up for major and medium irrigation projects.

Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) :

- Launched in 2015 to strengthen urban infrastructure and water-related services in selected cities and towns.
- It focuses on urban water supply, sewerage and septage management, storm water drainage, and wastewater reuse.
- It also supports green spaces, parks, and non-motorised urban transport infrastructure.

Namami Gange Programme :

- Launched in 2014-15 for the rejuvenation and conservation of the river Ganga and its tributaries.
- It focuses on sewage treatment, pollution control, riverfront development, biodiversity conservation, and ecological restoration. More than 500 projects have been sanctioned.

Water Governance Structure in India

- **Ministry of Jal Shakti** : Nodal ministry for Water resources, Drinking water supply, and Sanitation
- **Central Water Commission** : It is an **attached office** of the **Ministry of Jal Shakti**.
- It focuses on surface water planning, river basin development, and flood control.
- **Central Ground Water Board** : it focuses on assessing groundwater resources and provides scientific inputs for aquifer management.
- **NITI Aayog**
- Evaluates State performance through the **Composite Water Management Index**.
- Promotes evidence-based policymaking and accountability.

Broader issues

Federal and Institutional Challenges : Water is primarily a State subject, while the Union government plays a coordinating and funding role. This multi-level structure often creates coordination and implementation challenges, highlighting the importance of cooperative federalism.

Integrated Water Management Approach : India is increasingly adopting integrated water governance through groundwater management, river restoration, wastewater reuse, efficient irrigation, and scientific monitoring systems to improve sustainability.

Agriculture and Urban Water Challenges : Agriculture consumes most of India's freshwater resources, making irrigation efficiency crucial. Rapid urbanisation has also increased pressure on water supply and sewage systems, making wastewater recycling and reuse important.

Transition toward a Circular Water Economy : India is gradually moving toward a circular water economy based on wastewater recycling, sustainable groundwater use, technological innovation, and participatory governance for long-term water security.

India's long-term water security will depend primarily on the efficiency, sustainability, and institutional strength of its water governance framework.

The toll of structural adjustments on the global South and a case for accountability

A recent paper published in BMJ Global Health argues that the IMF and World Bank should provide reparations for the long-term economic and social damage caused by Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Suggested approaches include compensation for lost national income, weakened public services, and welfare losses such as poverty and mortality.

Main Features of Structural Adjustment

During 1960s, many developing countries in global south had borrowed heavily in US dollars for industrialisation and development. When the United States Federal Reserve sharply increased interest rates in the late 1970s, it made debt repayments extremely expensive. SAPs were economic reform packages introduced by the IMF and the World Bank to counter this debt crises. They imposed strict conditions on countries seeking financial assistance, focusing on three major areas:

- **Austerity:** Reduction in public expenditure on health, education, food subsidies, and welfare programmes.
- **Privatisation:** Transfer of public enterprises and services to private ownership.
- **Deregulation and Liberalisation:** Removal of trade barriers, labour protections, industrial regulations, and capital controls.

Many developing countries had limited bargaining power and could not easily refuse the conditions.

Economic Impact on the Global South

Before SAPs, many newly independent countries had adopted state-led development and industrial policies, resulting in rising incomes between 1960 and 1980. However, growth sharply slowed during the adjustment era. Economic growth in the global South reportedly declined from an average of **3.2%** annually before SAPs to around **0.7%** during the 1980s and 1990s. The South collectively lost an estimated \$480 billion annually in potential national income. Most countries experienced inflation and rising food prices following currency devaluation and trade liberalisation.



Social and Public Health Consequences

The reduction in welfare spending severely affected healthcare and social protection systems. A 2017 review found that adjustment programmes contributed to additional child and maternal deaths due to weakened healthcare systems. In Kenya alone, researchers estimated around 3,05,000 excess infant deaths between 1986 and 2010 compared to pre-adjustment trends. Cuts in health expenditure, closure of medical facilities, reduced hiring of healthcare workers, and rising costs of imported medicines due to currency devaluation intensified the crisis.

Capital Outflows and Dependency

SAPs also accelerated financial outflows from developing countries. Removal of capital controls enabled multinational corporations to repatriate large profits, while trade deregulation facilitated tax avoidance and capital flight. The paper argues that these policies effectively reversed earlier post-colonial development gains by reopening vulnerable economies to external control and keeping labour and resources cheap for the global North.

As the IMF and World Bank enjoy sovereign immunity and remain dominated by developed countries in voting power, there is little chance of real reparations fleshing out. The paper therefore also calls for democratisation of these institutions, ending coercive conditionalities, and ensuring greater representation for the global South. Dissatisfaction with SAP-driven global financial governance has encouraged the rise of alternative institutions such as the BRICS New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. These institutions are seen as attempts by developing countries to create financing mechanisms with fewer intrusive conditionalities.

The Indian EXPRESS

NEET leak unacceptable: Who's accountable?

The cancellation of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test following allegations of a large-scale paper leak has raised serious concerns. Conducted by the National Testing Agency, NEET determines admission to nearly 1.3 lakh MBBS seats and affects the aspirations of over 22 lakh students annually. Investigations have led to the cancellation of the examination and transfer of the probe to the CBI. The incident highlights deeper systemic weaknesses in the functioning of the NTA, which was originally established in 2017 to professionalise and standardise high-stakes examinations. The controversy exposes structural vulnerabilities in India's examination ecosystem, including excessive dependence on private examination centre operators and logistics providers, weak accountability mechanisms and incomplete implementation of technology-based safeguards. Despite expert recommendations made by K. Radhakrishnan (former ISRO Chairman) committee, reforms relating to digital security, institutional oversight and operational accountability remain inadequately implemented. Repeated exam irregularities undermine public trust, impose severe psychological and financial costs on students and threaten the integrity of merit-based selection systems. Strengthening institutional accountability, reducing conflict of interest with private operators and building robust examination security systems are therefore critical policy priorities.

Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial

"Repeated examination irregularities in India reflect deeper institutional and governance failures rather than isolated instances of malpractice." Discuss in the context of recent controversies surrounding NEET and examine the reforms required to restore credibility to India's examination system.



Data and justice

The Supreme Court of India has launched two major digital initiatives — One Case One Data and Su-Sahayak — as part of the broader effort to modernise and digitise the Indian judiciary. OCOD seeks to create a unified digital identity for every case across different courts by integrating records and judicial data into a single interoperable platform to improve transparency, reduce duplication and manual verification that contribute to delays in case disposal. Su-Sahayak, integrated into the Supreme Court website, is an AI-enabled chatbot designed to assist users in accessing case status, judgments, cause lists and e-services more efficiently. Together, these reforms signal a transition towards technology-driven judicial administration and improved access to justice. However, the initiatives also raise important concerns relating to digital exclusion, privacy and algorithmic bias. Lawyers and litigants at the district and taluka levels may struggle with the costs of digital infrastructure, creating inequalities between metropolitan law firms and smaller practitioners. Dependence on text-based digital systems may exclude users lacking digital literacy or language familiarity, potentially creating new intermediaries and informal costs. It also raises concerns regarding data protection, cybersecurity and misuse of sensitive personal information.

Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial

"Digital transformation of the judiciary can improve efficiency and access to justice, but it also risks deepening inequalities and governance challenges." Discuss in the context of recent technological initiatives introduced by the Supreme Court of India.

thehindu **businessline.**

TUESDAY - MARCH 31, 2026

Poison in the food

The Centre's proposal to impose a nationwide ban on Paraquat Dichloride marks an important step towards addressing the growing public health and ecological risks associated with hazardous agrochemicals. Paraquat, widely used as a herbicide and weedicide, has been linked to severe health conditions such as kidney failure, lung fibrosis and Parkinson's disease. While States such as Telangana have imposed temporary restrictions, the present legal framework limits the duration of such bans. Rising pesticide dependence in India is driven by intensive irrigation, changing monsoon patterns, labour shortages, contract farming pressures and unsustainable cultivation practices in crops such as paddy and wheat. The issue highlights the broader challenge of balancing agricultural productivity with environmental sustainability and public health. Instead of merely banning harmful chemicals, integrated pest and weed management, crop rotation, intercropping, mulching, biological pest control, mechanical weeding and the prudent use of safer inputs should be promoted. Diversification towards less input-intensive crops like millets and pulses, along with the promotion of traditional crop varieties, can also help reduce chemical dependence while improving soil health and resilience.

Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial

"India's growing dependence on chemical pesticides reflects deeper structural challenges in agriculture." Discuss in the context of the proposed ban on paraquat dichloride and examine the need for sustainable pest and weed management practices in Indian agriculture.

Managing coexistence in human-wildlife conflict zones

Human-wildlife conflict (HWC) is a complex socio-ecological challenge shaped by land use, livelihoods and ecological change.

According to the **International Union for Conservation of Nature Species Survival Commission**, HWC arises when wildlife behaviour negatively affects human interests, often leading to harm for both people and animals. It is increasingly viewed as a socio-ecological issue rather than merely a law-and-order problem.



Major Drivers of Human-Wildlife Conflict

The rise in HWC is closely linked to habitat fragmentation, deforestation, agricultural expansion, infrastructure development, urbanisation, and climate change. Expanding infrastructure disrupt wildlife corridors and natural movement routes. In countries such as India, Brazil, Indonesia, Kenya and Tanzania, recurring conflicts involve elephants, big cats, wild boars, and monkeys. Crop raiding and livestock predation are often adaptive responses by animals facing shrinking habitats and declining natural prey.

Global Patterns & International Best Practices

South Asia, Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa experience some of the most severe forms of HWC due to high population density and biodiversity overlap.

- **Botswana and Namibia** have implemented community-based natural resource management systems where local communities benefit economically through tourism and conservation-linked incentives.
- **Costa Rica** integrates ecological corridors into national planning to preserve habitat connectivity, while Finland uses real-time wildlife monitoring and quick compensation systems to reduce tensions.

These models emphasise community participation, scientific planning, and reliable compensation mechanisms.

Evidence from across the globe shows that community-managed forests, predator-proof livestock enclosures, and coordinated grazing systems can significantly reduce conflict. India needs integrated land-use planning that balances conservation and development. Protecting wildlife corridors, strengthening ecological restoration, improving compensation delivery, and involving local communities in decision-making are essential.

Human-Wildlife Conflict in India

India witnesses frequent conflict involving elephants, leopards, tigers, monkeys, and wild boars. Hundreds of people die annually in elephant encounters, while livestock losses due to predators remain substantial. India has adopted compensation schemes, early-warning systems, solar fencing, and legal conservation frameworks under laws such as the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. However, implementation challenges persist due to delays in compensation, inadequate coordination, and uneven accessibility for marginalised communities.

Key Challenges in Existing Approaches

- Responses to HWC often remain reactive, fragmented, and poorly coordinated.
- Compensation mechanisms are frequently delayed and inadequate, reducing public trust.
- Measures like solar fencing and alarm systems show limited success due to varying local ecological and social conditions.
- Technical solutions such as elephant fertility control are considered impractical in India's vast and fragmented landscapes.
- Habitat restoration, protection of wildlife corridors, and coexistence-based conservation are viewed as more sustainable approaches.
- Rapid infrastructure expansion, land-use change, and developmental pressures continue to intensify conflicts.

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) Consider the following statements:
(2019)

1. In the revenue administration of the Delhi Sultanate, the in charge of revenue collection was known as 'Amil'.
2. The iqta system of Sultans of Delhi was an ancient indigenous institution.
3. The office of 'Mir Bakshi' came into existence during the reign of Khalji Sultans of Delhi.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

2) Consider the following statements:
(2021)

1. It was during the reign of Iltutmish that Chengiz Khan reached the Indus in pursuit of the fugitive Khwarezm prince.
2. It was during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughluq that Taimur occupied Multan and crossed the Indus.
3. It was during the reign of Deva Raya II of the Vijayanagara Empire that Vasco da Gama reached the coast of Kerala.

Which of the statements given above is / are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2
- (c) 3 only
- (d) 2 and 3

WONDERS OF INDIA

Discover the diverse cultural heritage of India, one element at a time.

**Kashida Embroidery**

Kashida Embroidery is the traditional embroidery art of Kashmir, known for its delicate needlework, vibrant colours, and strong Persian influence. Introduced through Persian cultural contacts, Kashida draws inspiration from the natural beauty of Kashmir, incorporating motifs of flowers, birds, fruits, lakes, and mountains. Historically, the craft flourished under the patronage of rulers such as the Mughals, Afghans, Sikhs, and Dogras, who used richly embroidered shawls as royal garments and diplomatic gifts. Over time, Kashida became popular among ordinary people as well and expanded beyond shawls to garments, bags, belts, wall hangings, floor coverings, and home furnishings.

The craft is highly labour-intensive and usually involves multiple skilled artisans, with no single person completing an entire piece. Traditionally, men mainly undertake embroidery work, while women prepare yarn and related materials. Craftsmen use a special thimble called Nyatth on the fourth finger of the right hand to push needles through thick fabric. Embroiderers often work in the traditional Zangvaitth posture, sitting with knees raised and backs supported by cushions or wooden planks. Combining artistic refinement, royal heritage, and deep cultural symbolism, Kashida remains one of India's most celebrated textile traditions.



Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) The correct answer is (a)

Statement 1: "In the revenue administration of the Delhi Sultanate, the in charge of revenue collection was known as 'Amil'." **This statement is correct.**

The term 'Amil' referred to the officer responsible for revenue collection during the Delhi Sultanate period. The Amil's primary duty was to collect taxes and ensure the smooth functioning of the revenue system in the region assigned to them.

Statement 2: "The iqta system of Sultans of Delhi was an ancient indigenous institution."

The Iqta system was introduced to India by the Turkish rulers, inspired by practices in the Islamic world, particularly Persia and Central Asia. Under this system, land (iqta) was assigned to nobles or officers, who collected revenue and maintained troops for the Sultan. It was not an indigenous Indian institution but a foreign concept adapted by the Delhi Sultans.

This statement is incorrect.

Statement 3: "The office of 'Mir Bakshi' came into existence during the reign of Khalji Sultans of Delhi." The Mir Bakshi was a key officer responsible for military administration, including the recruitment, payment, and organization of soldiers. This office was established during the Mughal period, particularly under Akbar, and was not a feature of the Delhi Sultanate or Khalji administration. **This statement is incorrect.**



2) The correct answer is (a)

Statement 1: "It was during the reign of Iltutmish that Chengiz Khan reached the Indus in pursuit of the fugitive Khwarezm prince." **This statement is correct.** During the reign of Iltutmish (1211–1236 CE), Chengiz Khan, the Mongol leader, pursued the Khwarezm prince Jalaluddin to the borders of India and reached the Indus River in 1221 CE. Iltutmish diplomatically avoided conflict with Chengiz Khan by refusing to provide refuge to the Khwarezm prince, thus saving the Delhi Sultanate from a Mongol invasion.

Statement 2: "It was during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughluq that Taimur occupied Multan and crossed the Indus." This statement is incorrect. Taimur (Timur) invaded India in 1398 CE during the reign of Nasir-ud-Din Mahmud Tughluq, the last ruler of the Tughluq dynasty, not during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughluq (1325–1351 CE). Taimur crossed the Indus, sacked Delhi, and caused widespread destruction, but this occurred much later than Muhammad bin Tughluq's time.

Statement 3: "It was during the reign of Deva Raya II of the Vijayanagara Empire that Vasco da Gama reached the coast of Kerala." Vasco da Gama reached the coast of Kerala (Calicut) in 1498 CE. By this time, the Vijayanagara Empire was ruled by the Saluva dynasty, not Deva Raya II. Deva Raya II ruled from 1422–1446 CE, more than 50 years before Vasco da Gama's arrival. **This statement is incorrect.**

