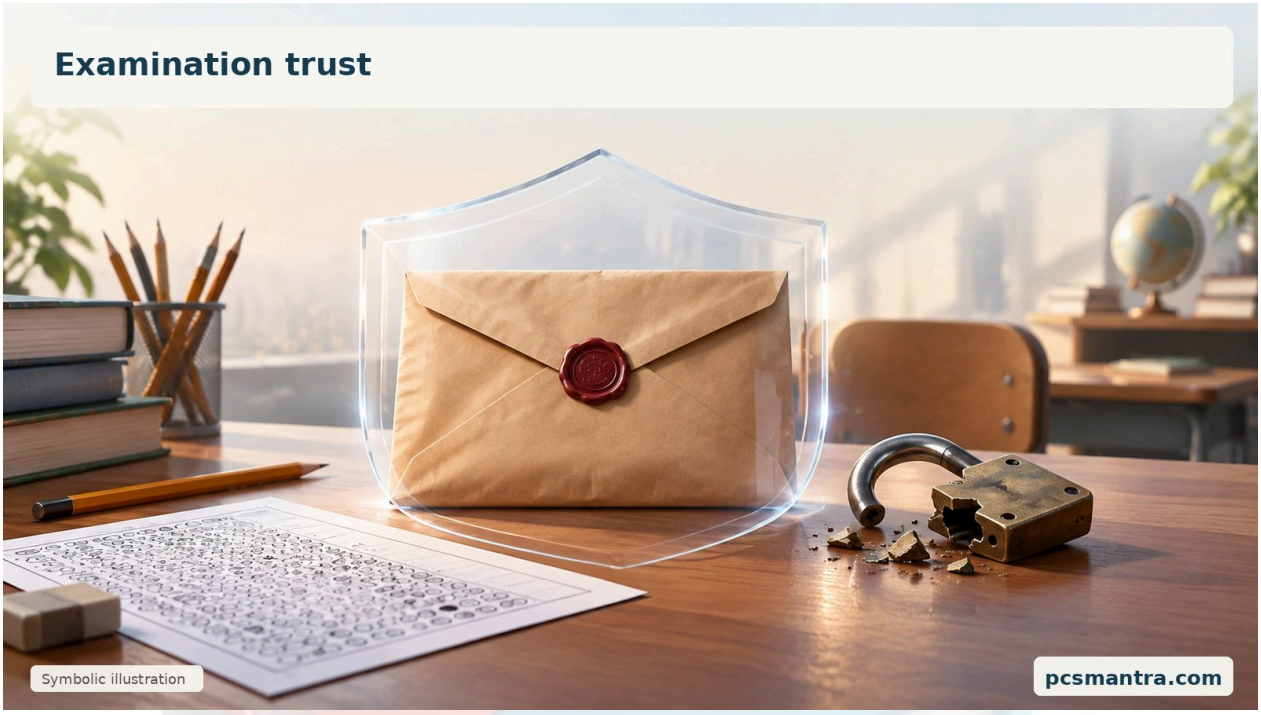
NEET-UG 2026 Cancelled: A Test of Examination Trust

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Cancelling the examination of more than 22 lakh candidates is no administrative routine. The decision shows that despite technical security, the weakest link of the examination system remains the human chain.



Original symbolic illustration: examination trust. Not a photograph of the reported event.

Why in the News

The National Testing Agency (NTA) cancelled the NEET-UG 2026 examination held on 3 May, on 12 May 2026. The reason: allegations of a question-paper leak and the investigation findings of law-enforcement agencies, after which the agency said that 'the present examination process cannot be allowed to stand'. The Centre handed the matter to the CBI; dates for a fresh examination will be announced separately. This is the first cancellation since NEET began in 2016.

What Is the Responsibility of NEET and the NTA?

NEET-UG is the single national examination for admission to undergraduate medical courses; it is conducted by the NTA, the autonomous testing agency created for higher-education entrance examinations. The value of an examination of this scale rests on its

fairness: the same question paper, the same time, lakhs of candidates. If the sanctity breaks, not the results but the process has to be cancelled.

Key Facts

Scale: About 22.7 lakh candidates were registered and 22.05 lakh sat the examination; 5,432 centres in India and abroad. The NTA's largest single-session examination.

Timeline: The NTA received information of irregularities on 7 May; the matter was sent for investigation on 8 May; a press release came on 10 May; the cancellation on 12 May.

Evidence of the leak: The Rajasthan SOG's investigation received a complaint from Sikar; a 150-page 'guess paper' was found with 410 questions, of which 120 questions appeared verbatim in the 3 May examination - a share of about 600 marks out of 720. This material had been circulating in Jaipur, Sikar, Jhunjhunu and Churu for about a month before the examination.

Arrangements for candidates: The registration, candidature and centre choice of the May cycle will carry forward into the fresh examination; no fresh registration or additional fee; the fee paid will be refunded and the re-examination will be held from the NTA's internal resources.

Scope of the investigation: The CBI's FIR includes BNS sections of criminal conspiracy, cheating, criminal breach of trust, theft and destruction of evidence, the Prevention of Corruption Act and the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024; roles, middlemen and organised networks are within the investigation's scope.

Security claims: This time question papers travelled in GPS-fitted vehicles with specific watermarks; centres had AI-assisted CCTV monitoring and biometric verification - measures implemented after the recommendations of the 2024 committee.

Why Did the System Fail Even After 2024?

The weight of the precedent: In the 2024 leak, the Supreme Court, while refusing a re-test, had said the material did not show a 'systemic leak', although a leak in Jharkhand-Bihar was acknowledged and at least 155 candidates were found to have benefited. The Centre had then refused to cancel the examination.

Technology versus the human chain: GPS, watermarks, CCTV and biometrics protect the transport-and-centre level; but the material had been circulating in the preparation-distribution chain a month before the examination. Security's weakest point was not technology but the people inside the chain.

The cost of the decision: The cancellation costs 22 lakh candidates time, money and mental burden; but the NTA's argument is that the damage of letting a contaminated process stand is bigger and more lasting.

Analysis and Way Forward

Three threads will decide the way ahead: how high and how wide the CBI investigation goes; how orderly the announcement and execution of the re-examination is; and whether the punishment framework of the 2024 Act reaches the real culprits. Options for institutional reform are at hand: a decentralised or digitally controlled process of question-paper creation and distribution, a clear account of centre-level responsibility, and a protocol of quick, transparent action on leak information. Calling it an 'isolated incident' twice in a single year becomes a sign of repetition rather than institutional learning.

Difference Between Concepts

An incident of leak and the examination process being contaminated are different things: the first is a crime, the second an administrative conclusion. The decision to cancel is not the investigation's final finding; the CBI investigation and the re-examination are two separate, parallel processes.

Mains Perspective

Connect with GS-II (institutions, governance, education policy) and GS-IV (public trust, ethics); keep institutional analysis rather than political statements.

UPSC CSE Mains Style: Original Practice Question

'The sanctity of an examination is an asset of public trust.' Evaluate this statement in the light of the NEET-UG 2026 cancellation.

(Answer in 150 words) | 10 marks

Answer Outline

Introduction: Give the context of the cancellation of the NEET-UG examination in May 2026 and its effect on the trust of lakhs of candidates.

Main Body: The sequence of events and the evidence; reasons for lapses even after security measures; the cost of cancellation versus continuity; conclude with suggestions for institutional reform.

Conclusion: Run the inquiry and the re-examination in parallel and restore trust through a secure question-paper chain, accountability and a transparent response. Also weigh the cost of cancellation to students; do not treat an administrative decision as proof of guilt of every accused, and do not write the May position as today's re-examination status without checking.

Sources

- New Indian Express: the cancellation, the CBI inquiry and the SOG findings, 12 May 2026
- Indian Express: the NTA's statement and the FIR's details, 12 May 2026

Verification note: the account of the cancellation has been checked from the full text of two independent reports (New Indian Express, Indian Express), which quote the NTA's statement in identical words; we could not read the NTA's original statement directly. The leak allegations are under investigation; no person or institution has been held guilty.

Also read: A hundred years of UPSC: wisdom and a spirit of service along with knowledge in selection.

Remember: Examination security is assessed not by the list of technology but by the weakest human link.

