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NEET-UG 2026 Paper Leak — CBI Investigation, NTA Under Fire, Re-Exam June 21

17 May 2026

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NEET-UG 2026 Paper Leak — CBI Investigation, NTA Under Fire, Re-Exam June 21

 17 May 2026 · 5 min read · 2 tags

WHY IN NEWS:

NEET-UG 2026, held on May 3 for **2.27 million candidates** across India, was **cancelled on May 12, 2026** after a large-scale paper leak surfaced. The CBI arrested retired Pune lecturer **P V Kulkarni** as the primary source — he was involved in setting Chemistry questions and translating the paper into Marathi. By May 17, CBI had arrested **15–16 persons**, with ~45 detained or questioned. A fresh examination is scheduled for **June 21, 2026**. Multiple petitions before the Supreme Court seek dissolution or restructuring of the **National Testing Agency (NTA)** — mirroring the 2024 NEET scandal.

TIMELINE OF THE 2026 NEET-UG CONTROVERSY

DATE	EVENT
May 3, 2026	NEET-UG 2026 held across India; 2.27 million candidates appear
May 4–8, 2026	Suspected question paper circulated on social media; students report match with actual questions
May 10, 2026	MoE orders NTA to investigate; NTA denies leak
May 12, 2026	MoE cancels NEET-UG 2026; CBI given jurisdiction
May 13–15, 2026	CBI arrests: Pune lecturer PV Kulkarni as primary source; 15+ arrested
May 17, 2026	Re-exam date announced: June 21, 2026; 45 persons detained/questioned; Supreme Court petitions filed

HOW THE LEAK HAPPENED — CBI'S FINDINGS

MECHANISM	DETAIL
Source	P V Kulkarni — retired Pune lecturer; Chemistry question-setter for NEET-UG 2026; also translated paper into Marathi
Method	Handwritten copy of paper photographed/transcribed; converted to PDF; circulated via WhatsApp and Telegram 24–36 hrs before exam
Price	Rs 2–5 lakh per copy (different rates for full paper vs. individual sections)
Distribution hub	Primary epicentre identified in Sikar, Rajasthan; secondary nodes in Pune, Delhi, Patna
Exam day	Some coaching centre networks distributed leaked answers as “prediction papers” the night before
NTA role	CBI told court: “paper leak traced to NTA source” — insider involvement confirmed

THE NTA PROBLEM

What is NTA?

National Testing Agency (NTA):

- Established in 2017 as an **autonomous body under MoE** for conducting entrance examinations
- Conducts: NEET-UG (medical), JEE-Main (engineering), CUET (university admissions), UGC-NET, CMAT, GPAT
- Replaced CBSE for conducting JEE-Main; designed to professionalise entrance exam administration

NTA's Track Record of Controversy

YEAR	CONTROVERSY
2021	JEE-Main server glitches; re-examination for some
2022	CUET glitches; hundreds of students affected
2024	NEET-UG 2024 — grace marks controversy, paper leak allegations, Supreme Court intervention; NTA DG replaced
2024	UGC-NET cancelled day after exam after paper found on dark web
2026	NEET-UG 2026 — full exam cancelled post-leak; second major NEET scandal in 3 years

Structural Problems at NTA

- ❶ **Outsourcing vulnerability:** Paper setting, printing, and logistics outsourced to private vendors — each handoff is a potential leak point
- ❷ **Insider threat:** Question setters have privileged access; insufficient background verification
- ❸ **Centralised paper distribution:** Simultaneous national exam creates a single-point-of-failure; one leak contaminates the entire exam
- ❹ **Weak whistleblower mechanism:** No confidential channel for question setters to report coercion

SUPREME COURT PETITIONS

Multiple petitions filed as of May 17, 2026:

- **FAIMA (Federation of All India Medical Association):** Seeks dissolution or complete restructuring of NTA; judicial supervision of re-exam
- **Student petitions:** Seek compensation for lost exam fees, accommodation, and travel
- **Academic institutions:** Question the fairness of June 21 re-exam timeline (barely 5 weeks)
- **States:** Tamil Nadu, West Bengal petitions seek decentralisation of NEET

RE-EXAM LOGISTICS

ISSUE	STATUS
Date	June 21, 2026
Registration	No fresh registration required; all May 3 candidates auto-enrolled
Fee	Full refund to candidates who did not appear; re-exam free for all
Exam centres	Under review; NTA exploring distribution to more secure, smaller centres
Paper security	CBI overseeing logistics chain; end-to-end digital tracking proposed

NEET-UG 2024 PRECEDENT

The 2026 controversy mirrors **NEET-UG 2024**:

- 2024: Grace marks controversy + paper leak allegations → Supreme Court intervention → CBI investigation → NTA Director General replaced
- 2024: SC declined to cancel exam; ordered fresh exam only for grace marks beneficiaries
- **Key difference (2026)**: Full cancellation ordered — indicates leak's scale was far more extensive than 2024

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2 — Governance and Social Issues

- **NTA and entrance exam governance**: institutional design, accountability, need for reform
- **Right to education and meritocracy**: NEET controversy and its impact on medical education access (particularly for students from rural/economically weaker sections who cannot afford coaching)
- **NEET's constitutional journey**: Supreme Court upheld NEET in 2016 (overruling Tamil Nadu exemption attempt); 2021 Tamil Nadu bill seeking exemption; Article 254 conflict of laws; Centre's legislative competence
- **Supreme Court's role in exam administration**: judicial supervision of NTA; limits of institutional deference

GS Paper 4 — Ethics

- **Institutional integrity:** breach of trust by question-setters; coercive corruption networks targeting vulnerable aspirants
- **Equity impact:** poor students who cannot re-take exams easily are disproportionately harmed by leaks; ethical responsibility of the state to provide a fair examination system

Keywords: NEET-UG 2026, NTA, paper leak, CBI, P V Kulkarni, FAIMA, Supreme Court NTA dissolution, Re-NEET June 21 2026, NEET 2024 comparison, entrance exam governance, MoE, meritocracy.

National Eligibility cum Entrance Test – Undergraduate; single national entrance exam for MBBS/BDS/AYUSH admissions; conducted by NTA; mandated by Supreme Court in 2016 (overruling MCI's earlier exam); all 697 medical colleges in India use NEET scores.

National Testing Agency; set up 2017 under MoE; autonomous body; conducts 15+ national-level entrance/fellowship exams; DG position became politically sensitive after 2024 and 2026 controversies.

Apex body of over 4 lakh MBBS graduates and PG doctors; advocacy on medical education policy, NTA reform, hospital violence laws.

Tamil Nadu has consistently opposed NEET, arguing it disadvantages state board students vs. CBSE; passed Bills seeking exemption in 2021 and 2023; Bills await Presidential assent; constitutional question: Entry 25, Concurrent List — Parliament's NEET law prevails.

CBI has concurrent jurisdiction under Delhi Special Police Establishment Act; MoE/MHA can refer exam fraud cases to CBI; CBI has ECIR (Examination Crime Investigation Report) mechanism for organised cheating networks.

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