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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Rounding Up the Usual Suspects: NEET, the NTA and the Cost of Centralisation

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Would restoring examination conduct to the States reduce leaks, or simply distribute them more thinly across the country?"

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

Every examination crisis in recent years has ended the same way: an officer is moved, a law is promised, and the architecture that produced the failure survives intact. The removal of the higher education secretary, followed by the National Testing Agency dismissing 47 officials, is the reflex rather than the remedy.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

This is a **GS2 federalism** answer disguised as an education story. It supplies the constitutional history (the 42nd Amendment moving education to the **Concurrent List**), the judicial history (NEET struck down in 2013, upheld in 2016), the institutional design question (a Societies Registration Act body wielding national examination power), and a live reform proposal. Few single editorials give you that much verifiable structure.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

NEET was introduced in 2016 and the **National Testing Agency (NTA)** was registered as an autonomous body in 2018 under the Societies Registration Act, charged with conducting NEET, JEE, UGC-NET and the **Common University Entrance Test (CUET)** for undergraduate and postgraduate central university admissions.

The judicial path is the part most aspirants get wrong.

YEAR	DEVELOPMENT
2010	The Medical Council of India sets up NEET, in effect taking over admissions to private medical colleges
2013	A three-judge Supreme Court Bench strikes NEET down 2-1 as unconstitutional; southern States in particular view it as an erosion of federal rights
2016	A five-judge Bench sets aside the 2013 order; NEET becomes judicially mandated
2018	The NTA is registered to conduct NEET, JEE, UGC-NET and CUET

The original impulse was UPA-era: curb the capitation fees charged by private medical colleges by removing their discretion over admissions. A parallel attempt to limit new colleges through population-based licensing, one licence per million population, was pushed back by the southern States and Maharashtra and set aside.

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

The scale is the first problem. About 2.2 million candidates appeared for NEET this year, competing for **1,39,489 MBBS seats**, a selection rate of roughly five per cent. Another 25,000 to 35,000 go abroad for medical degrees, to the former Soviet republics, the Philippines and Bangladesh, and must still clear NEET's 50th-percentile **threshold** to practise on return. The undersupply of seats, not the examination, is the underlying condition.

The design is the second. An examination system of this scale is run by a body registered as a *society*, whose testing centres, IT infrastructure, paper distribution and monitoring are outsourced to private vendors. Centralising authority while decentralising execution produces the worst combination: national blast radius, contractor-level accountability.

The personnel response is the third. Officials have been removed after successive leaks, including the NTA's director-general after the 2024 NEET leak, while the outgoing higher education secretary was himself the NTA's first director-general. Rotating the same officers through the same posts does not alter the incentives the structure creates.

Meanwhile the centralising direction continues. The **Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan Bill, 2025** proposes an overarching higher education commission with three regulatory councils, subsuming the UGC, AICTE and NCTE. It has been stalled in the Standing Committee.

The federal objection deserves a fair hearing rather than dismissal. Education became a **Concurrent List** subject through the **42nd Amendment, 1976**, enacted during the Emergency. Before NEET, States ran their own admission tests. Whether a single national test suits a diverse, multilingual federation is a legitimate constitutional question, not merely a regional grievance.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Separate **three claims** that are usually run together:

- ❶ **Standardisation is desirable.** A common benchmark reduces capitation fees and arbitrary admission. This is the strongest argument for NEET.
- ❷ **Standardisation requires centralised conduct.** This does not follow. A common syllabus and benchmark can coexist with State-conducted examinations, as several other federations demonstrate.
- ❸ **Centralised conduct requires a single agency with outsourced execution.** This is a design choice, not a necessity, and it is where the failures actually occur.

Most weak answers defend or attack NEET as a whole. Strong answers accept claim one and interrogate claims two and three.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Picture a funnel with a very wide mouth and a very narrow neck. Into the mouth pour 2.2 million aspirants. The neck admits about 139,000. The funnel's walls are made of a single examination, conducted by a 25-person society, executed by private vendors. Any crack anywhere in that wall spills the entire cohort, which is why a leak in one State forces re-examination nationally. Decentralisation does not widen the neck, but it replaces one wall with many, so a crack in one no longer empties the funnel.

WAY FORWARD

- **Separate standard-setting from test conduct.** A national body can define syllabus, difficulty and equating while States conduct examinations under audit.
- **Bring execution in-house or make vendors liable.** Outsourcing without enforceable accountability is the proximate cause of most failures.
- **Expand supply.** Paper leaks are a symptom of scarcity; 139,000 seats for 2.2 million aspirants guarantees desperate behaviour regardless of enforcement.
- **Resist the reflex of a fresh statute.** A standalone anti-cheating law adds little where the general criminal law already applies; institutional redesign is harder and more useful.
- **Treat the States as partners.** Concurrent-List subjects were meant for cooperation, not displacement.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC has tested **cooperative federalism**, the role of regulatory bodies, and the governance of higher education, including questions on autonomy of institutions. This editorial supplies contemporary evidence for all three.

Practice question: “Centralisation of examination conduct has delivered standardisation at the cost of **resilience**.” Critically examine with reference to the National Testing Agency. (250 words)

Interview angle: Would restoring examination conduct to the States reduce leaks, or simply distribute them more thinly across the country?

Sources: Business Standard, PIB

Source: Rounding Up the Usual Suspects: NEET, the NTA and the Cost of Centralisation — Ujjyari.com | Free
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