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NTA chief moved out, Govt sets up panel under ISRO ex-chief to plan exam reforms

Latest: NEET-PG on June 23 put on hold, affecting 2 lakh students

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NTA DG Subodh Kumar Singh. (PTI)

Hours after it announced an expert committee to recommend a roadmap for examination reforms and review the structure and functioning of the **National Testing Agency** (NTA), the Union government Saturday **removed Subodh Kumar Singh as NTA chief** and put him on “compulsory wait” in the Department of Personnel and Training.

This decision came even as another examination — NEET PG scheduled on June 23 — was put on hold, affecting approximately 2 lakh candidates.

And the Education Ministry, in a late-night announcement, stated that the CBI, which is already looking into the UGC-NET paper leak, will also investigate the irregularities alleged in the **conduct of NEET-UG** .

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This decision was taken after the Centre received a report from the Bihar government's Economic Offences Unit (EOU) Saturday (see adjacent story) stating that its probe "clearly suggests a paper leak" for NEET-UG.

According to sources, CBI officers were at Shastri Bhawan for several hours, meeting senior officers of the Education Ministry, after which it was decided to hand over the matter to the probe agency. "It is reiterated that any individual/organisation found to be involved will face strictest action," the Ministry said.



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The string of developments comes just ahead of the inaugural session of the 18th Lok Sabha Monday in which the Centre is set to face a strong Opposition attack over the handling of these exams and the distress caused to students.

Ever since the Lok Sabha results on June 4, when the NEET-UG results were declared, three public examinations conducted by the Centre – [UGC-NET](#) , [CSIR-UGC NET](#) , and now NEET PG – have been either cancelled or postponed, affecting close to 13 lakh candidates.

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The NEET-PG, which is the entrance test for admissions to postgraduate medical programmes, was postponed by the Health Ministry “taking into consideration the recent incidents of allegations regarding the integrity of certain competitive examinations”.

The Ministry said it has decided to undertake a thorough assessment of the robustness of processes of the NEET-PG entrance examination. This was announced a day after the Education Ministry asked NTA to postpone CSIR-UGC NET for the same reason.

The Education Ministry is yet to take a decision on the fate of NEET-UG. “Look, we acknowledge that we have a problem at hand and we are going step by step to signal accountability and fix the problem. As promised (by the Minister), a reforms committee has been set up, NTA leadership was changed and now the investigation has been handed over to CBI. Please wait, a decision (on NEET-UG) will also be taken soon,” said a senior official who did not wish to be identified.

The [expert committee comprises seven members and will be chaired by former ISRO](#) chairman K Radhakrishnan. Its mandate is to recommend reforms in testing procedures and data security protocols, and to review the structure and functioning of the NTA which is at the centre of a storm over the conduct of the exams.

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the government department of examinations, the committee members include AIIMS director Randeep Guleria; [Hyderabad](#) Central University Vice-Chancellor Professor B. J. Rao; Professor Ramamurthy K., Professor Emeritus at the Department of Civil Engineering, IIT Madras; entrepreneur and co-founder of People Strong Pankaj Bansal; Professor Aditya Mittal, who is presently the Dean of Student Affairs at IIT Delhi; and Govind Jaiswal, Joint Secretary in the Ministry.

“The committee members have been handpicked based on their domain knowledge to tackle different challenges before us. For instance, Dr Guleria knows the ins and outs of the medical system. Aditya Mittal was the IIT JEE Chairman in the past and is familiar with what it takes for the IITs to conduct a foolproof exam like JEE advanced,” said another official.

In a post on X Saturday, Education Minister [Dharmendra Pradhan](#) said, “Transparent, tamper-free and zero-error examinations is a commitment. Setting up of the high-level committee of experts is the first of a series of step to improve efficiency of the examination process, put an end to all possible malpractices, strengthen data security protocols and overhaul and reform the NTA. Student interests and their bright future will always be our govt’s top priority.”

Significantly, Dr Radhakrishnan has been the incumbent government’s go-to person for academic reforms. He has headed several committees set up by the Education Ministry, including one to suggest measures to strengthen the accreditation system and another established by the IIT Council to suggest a roadmap for IITs to set up offshore campuses.

precautionary measure

Pulmonologist Dr Guleria was Director, AIIMS New Delhi, from 2017 to 2022. He has also served as professor and head of the Department of Pulmonary Medicine and Sleep Disorders at AIIMS. He is now the chairman of the Institute of Internal Medicine, Respiratory and Sleep Medicine, Medanta.

Professor B J Rao, who is now Vice Chancellor, University of Hyderabad, has previously served as senior professor, Chair of Biology, Dean-Faculty, at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) Tirupati. He has also served as senior professor at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, [Mumbai](#).

Bansal is on the board of directors of Karmayogi Bharat, a special purpose vehicle set up by the Centre to operate the iGOT (Integrated Government Online Training) Karmayogi platform, which is meant to be an e-learning platform for “civil service officials to enhance their overall competency.”

Professor Aditya Mittal, Dean Student Affairs at IIT Delhi, is former Chairman of JEE (Advanced).

According to the committee’s terms of reference, the panel will analyse the examination process, and “suggest measures to improve efficiency of the system and forestall any possible breach.” It will also review the standard operating procedures and protocols of the NTA and suggest measures to strengthen these. The committee will also examine the security protocol concerned with paper-setting and recommend measures to improve data security processes.

It will also make recommendations on the organisational structure of the NTA, define responsibilities at every level, and “assess the current grievance redressal mechanism” at the agency.



Subodh Kumar Singh, the NTA chief who was removed Saturday, has always preferred to keep a low profile and avoid the media glare.

According to government sources, he was transferred out of NTA to signal accountability.

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Retired 1985 batch officer Pradeep Singh Karola has been appointed in his place till a regular chief is appointed or until further orders.

Before he took over as NTA chief last June, Subodh Kumar Singh was Additional Secretary in the Department of Food and Public Distribution under the Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.