



Observations & Suggestions to the High-power Committee on reforms related to National Testing Agency (NTA)

New Delhi/Hyderabad,

13th July 2024.

To the esteemed members of the committee,

Warm Greetings!

Our country has a great educational system. We have been producing quality students and turned them into good citizens. To some extent, we clearly see the system is broken, and that is true, there are certain levers that we have to change that would usher in a thousand-fold impact which is positive and meaningful. Some of you are academicians, some of you are researchers, and, some bureaucrats. Nonetheless, you are all members of intelligentsia, and, as such, we all possess a great degree of understanding of the challenges of our times, appreciate our journey, be grateful to our elders, friends, colleagues, acquaintances and partners with whom we all work towards building better processes and systems.

Personally, I believe NTA to be a remarkable organization which blazed some great trails and made a huge positive impact on the examination process in terms of quality, accuracy and providing a hassle-free experience to test-takers and, simultaneously, established certain decent benchmarks with regard to the academic testing paradigms in India. The recent incidents of actual and alleged paper leaks underscore the need to undertake further set of stringent reforms. Under this committee's leadership, I am certain that it would be the case.

Based on our personal experiences, observations, information, inferences and given our understanding of the problem at hand, here are certain focus areas that are essential to work upon –

1. Restructuring NTA's Governing Council

Expanding the governing council of NTA to include members from ALL education boards, professional educational bodies and technical institutions, and the information technology (IT) industry experts from areas of cybersecurity and blockchain technology or any other professionals that the competent authority deems fit.



2. One Nation, One Testing Agency (in letter and spirit)

All public competitive examinations across all tiers of education (secondary, higher secondary, diploma, graduate, post-graduate, doctoral and post-doctoral level, professional educational bodies, universities, constitutional bodies like UPSC, quasi-government and statutory bodies) at national level should be held by NTA. There should simply be no other body that conducts its own test without NTA except CBSE and ICSE in their respective primary, secondary and higher secondary testing endeavours.

3. 100% Online Exam

With the technological strides we have made across many sectors over the past two decades, it is only logical that all exams be conducted online instead of the pen-and-paper mode. Any gaps in terms of logistics, capacity building and human resource management could be removed by pushing for NTA-like set-up at the State-level and building a network of Testing Centres widely across all states which could be jointly managed by NTA, respective STA's.

4. Questions Catalogue & Release Management

Have separate catalogues for sample validation questions and actual exam questions. Sample validation questions catalogue shall be used for verification of the real-time functioning of all (end-to-end) technical apparatus associated with the examination process and the actual exam questions catalogue to be released live at the time as mentioned on the hall-ticket (or) admit card. Based on the information we gathered, only a single questions catalogue is used for both these scenarios which is absurd.

5. Half-yearly Entrance Examinations & Admission Cycles

For all types of examinations, have 2 entrance exam cycles and all universities and medical colleges should start 2 admission cycles per year – Spring and Fall admission cycles to reduce stress on students.

6. Accommodating State Governments' concerns

A flexi-formula would be recommended with more degree of freedom to states as per the corresponding state governments' establishing their own State Testing Agency (STA) in-line with the National Testing Agency and a stringent law to avoid paper leaks.



Naturally, this formula shall be applicable to state universities and other state educational institutions.

| Tier of Govt. Quota | If STA, in-line with NTA, created | No STA created |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| State quota of seats | 55% | 50% |
| Central quota of seats | 45% | 50% |

7. Multi-purpose Government authenticated Testing Centres

Currently, NTA sets-up about 800 to 2000 testing centres across the country based on the type of examination i.e., NEET (UG), JEE (Mains) etc., Almost all of these testing centres are privately-held or owned privately by the edtech organizations, educational and training institutions. It is, therefore, necessary to build a proportion of these testing centres by the NTA in joint partnership with STAs of the corresponding state. These testing centres would also serve as the Test Practice Centres (TPCs). In addition, these testing centres could aid the trickling-down of edtech usage in towns, villages and remote areas and could be used by stakeholders at local level to improve the foundational learning and numeracy outcomes of our school-going children.

8. Education Ministry-led Stakeholder Consultation & Conflict Resolution

- Union Ministry of Education should undertake an in-depth consultation with all the stakeholders from intelligentsia, academia, students and state governments to understand and navigate the current landscape of the examinations.
- The existing conflicts and the new conflicts that are likely to arise should be resolved by Union Ministry of Education in consultation with ALL State Ministries of Education.

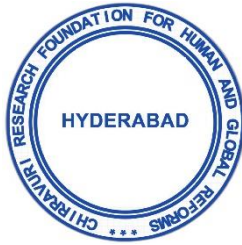
9. An over-arching parliamentary legislation

Parliament must enact a new legislation ensuring greater degree of functioning of NTA in terms of independence, funding, efficiency, accountability and transparency. This legislation should mandate State Governments to create their own State Testing Agencies with-in a stipulated period to build robust, independent, accountable, transparent and technology-driven examination infrastructure at the state-level across



all the states. The idea is to delegate some powers, functions and accountability to the state governments and create a shared pool of resources that would help build the strong examination apparatus. From the political perspective, paper leaks have occurred and will continue to occur either at National & State level as long as stronger testing systems are not established. NTA and STAs are the only way forward.

We hope our inputs would be of some value and use. Thank you all for your service to our nation and society!



Best wishes!



CRFHGR

Yours sincerely,

AKHIL CHIRRAVURI

(Chairman & MD)

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