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ANTI-PAPER LEAK LAW OF 2024 AND ITS ROLE IN COMBATING CORRUPTION IN PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS: A CRITICAL STUDY

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Abstract

The Anti-Paper Leak Law of 2024 marks a significant legislative step towards restoring integrity and transparency in India's public examination system. Enacted in response to recurring incidents of question paper leaks across various competitive and recruitment exams, the law introduces stringent penal provisions, technological safeguards, and institutional accountability to deter malpractice. This critical study analyzes the legal, administrative, and ethical dimensions of the law, examining its effectiveness in curbing corruption and reinforcing public trust in merit-based evaluation. It explores the scope of its application, enforcement mechanisms, and the challenges faced in its implementation. By evaluating key case studies and judicial responses, the paper highlights both the strengths and limitations of the legislation. The study also situates the law within the broader framework of education reforms and anti-corruption strategies. Ultimately, it offers policy recommendations for enhancing the law's efficacy, ensuring justice for affected candidates, and fostering a fair, competitive examination environment.

Keywords: Anti-Paper Leak Law, Examination Integrity, Systemic Corruption, Legal Accountability, Merit-Based Evaluation

1. Introduction

Perversion of anything from its purest form is corruption. Corruption in simple terms means misuse of power for but personal gain particularly when a person has a position of authority. One of the biggest challenges to social and economic advancement, fairness, and government is corruption. Corruption permeates a number of industries, including business, education, politics, and law enforcement. Corruption is ingrained in political, social, and bureaucratic systems in a nation like India, where governance is complex.⁸⁹⁰

According to Black's Law dictionary, corruption is "depravity, perversion or taint; an impairment of integrity, virtue or moral principle; especially the impairment of a public official's duties by bribery."⁸⁹¹ Corruption is a global phenomenon, and it is omnipotent. Hence no country it is free from corruption.⁸⁹² Corruption seriously affecting the developing nations because it diverts public resources which increases the inequality and hampers the progress. At its

⁸⁹⁰ Kumar P, 'Anti-Corruption Measures in India: A Democratic Assessment' (29 March 2019) <<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3362126>> accessed 25 March 2025

⁸⁹¹ Uzoechi, Reginald A. "Reshaping the Amorphous Nature of the Offence of Corruption in Nigeria." (2017) 6 (12) International Journal of Innovative Research and Development <https://www.academia.edu/75252207/Reshaping_the_Amorphous_Nature_of_the_Offence_of_Corruption_in_Nigeria> accessed 24 Mar. 2025.

⁸⁹² 'Corruption Is a Global Problem for Development. To Fight It, We All Have a Role to Play' (World Bank) <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2023/06/13/corruption-is-a-global-problem-for-development-to-fight-it-we-all-have-a-role-to-play>> accessed 24 March 2025

core, corruption is the abuse of interested power for private gain.

The Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions, 1997, defines corruption as follows. “any person intentionally to offer, promise or give any undue pecuniary or other advantage, whether directly or through intermediaries, to a foreign public official, for that official or for a third party, in order that the official act or refrain from acting in relation to the performance of official duties, in order to obtain or retain business or other improper advantage in the conduct of international business.”⁸⁹³

1.1 Corruption in Public Examinations

One of the most prevalent form of corruption is in education system, it jeopardize the integrity of the entire evaluation system. Public examination shapes the future of students as they serve as a pathway for higher education, government jobs and other opportunities. However, the corruption in public examination is a major concern which affects the basic principle of meritocracy, fairness and equal opportunity. The malpractices in the Public examinations, political interference and administrative issue and legal loopholes are some of the reasons because of which the examination system has transformed into a great opportunity for corruption which affects millions of students and job aspirants.

The issue is just not limited to cheating and examinations. It extends to large scale frauds such as paper leak, impersonation, bribery for favourable results and manipulation in the recruitment process. Due to such malpractices existing in the education system the public trust and education and the governance keeps reducing. In India, there are recurring cases regarding of paper leaks and recruitment scams have raised serious questions about the integrity of examination bodies.

2. Violation of Fundamental Rights and the Principle of Meritocracy

The Constitution of India through article 14, 16 and 21 guarantees equality before law, equal opportunities in public employment and the right to live with dignity respectively. Paper leaks and corruption in public examination violates search constitutional provision enabling undeserving candidates to gain an unfair advantage.

☒ Right to Equality (Article 14): Paper leaks as a violation of merit-based opportunities

Article 14 of the Indian Constitution ensures that every individual is treated equally by state or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.⁸⁹⁴ However when a public examination is compromised due to paper leak the candidates who have worked diligently and unfairly disadvantaged and those who engage in corrupt practices have unfair advantage and have access to leaked paper which helps them secure undue benefits. The public examination recruits on the basis of merit waste, however when there is a paper leak the basic principle of merit based opportunities is undermined.⁸⁹⁵ This fundamental right forms the bedrock of a just and equitable society. This moral principle collapses when paper leaks occur because they create a system where qualified candidates lose out to dishonest participants. Examination system breaches cause dedicated test-takers to lose their legitimate opportunities and allow those who engaged in unethical measures to receive unmerited benefits. The guarantee of equality outlined in the constitution becomes counterproductive due to these discriminatory practices which use criteria beyond individual excellence. Main objective of a fair and competitive examination system is to provide equal opportunity to everyone regardless of their background her connections. Paper leaks dismantle this principle and create a system for those who have access to leak material not

⁸⁹³ OECD, Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions, OECD/LEGAL/0293 (1997) <<https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/public/doc/205/205.en.pdf>> accessed 25 March 2025.

⁸⁹⁴ The Constitution of India, 1950 s 14

⁸⁹⁵ Advocates L& L, ‘Challenging Examination Results in Courts: Grounds & Remedies’ (Lodha & Lodha Advocates) <<https://lodhanlodha.com/articles/f/challenging-examination-results-in-courts-grounds-remedies>> accessed 25 March 2025

influential connections. Meritocracy collapses when paper leaks happen because these events destroy both examination integrity and block deserving opportunities for better lives and national development.

❑ Right to Education (Article 21A): Ensuring free and fair examinations as part of quality education

Article 21 of the Indian Constitution guarantees right to free education education to the children between the age of 6 to 15 years and has broadened the scope of right to education.⁸⁹⁶ This article primarily focusing access to elementary education however its underlying principle and to ensure quality education at all the levels of learning. Free and fair examination and intake components of a good education system as they provide assessment based on the students knowledge and skill. When the candidates come to know about the manipulation or unfair practices and they lose faith in their education and the fairness of the system. This not only affects their academic but also decreases the trust educational institution. Moreover, paper leaks can lead to recruitment of the individuals who are not qualified for the particular job into the educational institutions and government jobs which further compromise the quality of education and public service.

❑ Right to Employment (Article 16): Impact of leaks on fair recruitment for government jobs

The paper leaks affect the ability of Article 16 to ensure proper employment practices for government positions. The Indian Constitution through Article 16 provides public employment opportunities with equal treatment.⁸⁹⁷ Protection serves to ensure that selection occurs through merit systems and every citizen obtains equal possibilities to serve their country. Paper leaks undermine the right by compromising on the integrity of the education system. When the government jobs examination are manipulated, the candidates who weren't qualified for such

positions appointed to the position which has great power along with that post, while the deserving candidates do not get the rightful opportunities. This affects the efficiency and the effectiveness of the government services as well as erodes the public trust. The recruitment of candidates who are unqualified not only because of lack of skill but because of their individual integrity can lead to corruption, inefficiency, and a decline in the quality of public services.

3. Loopholes in Laws Prior to Anti Paper Leak Law, 2024

Before the enactment of the Anti-Paper Leak Law in 2024, the legal framework to deal with examination paper leaks in India was fragmented and inadequate. Various provisions from the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Information Technology Act, 2000, and the Prevention of Corruption Act were applied to such cases, but these laws were not designed to address the unique nature of examination-related offences. Consequently, enforcement agencies faced numerous challenges, including legal loopholes, weak deterrents, and inconsistent judicial interpretations. Exam fraud was not recognised as a specialised or serious offence, leading to ineffective prosecutions and minimal consequences for perpetrators.

One of the most significant gaps was the lack of a dedicated law targeting examination fraud. While sections of the IPC dealing with cheating, forgery, and conspiracy were invoked, they failed to capture the full scope and organized nature of modern exam-related crimes. The provisions of the Information Technology Act also proved outdated, especially as digital exam systems became common and question paper leaks shifted online. With limited digital forensic capacity and jurisdictional challenges, law enforcement struggled to trace cybercrimes, especially those involving encrypted platforms and dark web activities. Even when digital evidence was gathered, issues related to admissibility in courts hampered prosecutions.

⁸⁹⁶ The Constitution of India, 1950 A 21(a)

⁸⁹⁷ The Constitution of India, 1950 A 16

Furthermore, the success rate of prosecution remained low. While arrests were often made in large numbers, convictions were rare due to procedural delays, insufficient evidence, and lack of coordination among investigating agencies. Courts often treated exam leaks as minor offences, contributing to low deterrence. In some cases, powerful individuals—such as politicians or officials—were found to be involved, obstructing investigations and weakening the credibility of the justice process. Whistleblowers and investigators also faced threats, adding to the difficulty of securing convictions. Overall, the absence of a dedicated legal mechanism led to widespread examination irregularities and a loss of public trust in the system.

4. The Anti-Paper Leak Law of 2024 – Provisions and Implications

One of the most discussed legislative reforms in India is the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, also referred to as the Anti-Paper Leak Law of 2024, particularly with regard to preventing test malpractice and paper leaks. In India competitive exams exist to determine access to higher education and government jobs as well as professional opportunities and their integrity is a keystone of meritocracy. Despite that, concern has risen regarding the credibility and fairness of public examinations due to recurring paper leaks, fraudulent practices, and organized exam fraud. The provisions, and implications, of the Anti-Paper Leak Law of 2024 are explored in this chapter, whereby it outlines ways in which the examination security can be improved, offenders can be punished, and public confidence in the Indian examination system can be regained.

The objective of the Anti Paper Leak Law, 2024 is to ensure that the integrity of public examinations by:

1. Enhancing Transparency and Fairness: Maintaining public exams in the transparency and meritocracy, without

leakage of questions or any form of manipulation.

2. Deterring Malpractices: The imposition of strict penalties that are imprisonments and huge fines to be used against individuals and institutions that are involved in paper leaks to deter from malpractices.
3. Fixing Accountability: Prosecuting coaching centers, organized cheating networks, exam conducted authorities for helping conduct leaks and fraud in the test.
4. Strengthening Examination Security: As a means of enhancing examination security, the Technology is mandated for digital encryption, use of advanced technology and hostage monitoring utilizing artificial intelligence and applying blockchain security to prevent unauthorized usage to exam materials.
5. Restoring Public Trust: Addressing general concerns pertaining to fair exams of students, parents, and aspirants about the fairness of India's education and recruitment system.

In pursuit of these goals, the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 is a major step in the fight against corruptive tendencies and fairness of competitive exams. The rest of the sections will analyze the provisions of the law, the implementation strategy of the law and the general impact of the law on governance, society and education.⁸⁹⁸

4.1 Key Provisions of the Act

The key provisions of the act are as follows:

4.1.1 Definitions

The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 provides several important

⁸⁹⁸ Raghuvansh ST& S, 'Examining Public Examinations (Prevention Of Unfair Means) Act: Does It Pass Critical Lens?' (19 June 2024) <<https://www.livelaw.in/lawschool/articles/neet-paper-leak-and-public-examinations-prevention-of-unfair-means-act-260865>> accessed 25 March 2025

definitions which provide the tools necessary for enforcement and execution purposes. Such definitions serve the purpose of establishing the scope of the law, identifying key stakeholders, and ensuring the factors in the legal framework appropriately address examination malpractice. Below are some of the important definitions provided under section 2 of the act.

Section 2(1)(k) defines "public examination", it which refers to any examination conducted by a recognized public examination authority, as specified in the Schedule of the Act or notified by the Central Government.⁸⁹⁹ This ensures that the law covers a wide range of competitive exams, including those conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), Staff Selection Commission (SSC), National Testing Agency (NTA), and state-level public service commissions. By defining "public examination" explicitly, the Act establishes the jurisdiction of the law and prevents ambiguity in its enforcement.

Section 2(1)(h) defines "organised crime", as any unlawful activities committed by individuals or groups who engage in unfair means through collusion and conspiracy to pursue wrongful gains in public examinations.⁹⁰⁰ This highlights the systemic nature of examination fraud, often involving coordinated networks of corrupt officials, coaching centers, cybercriminals, and middlemen. Recognizing such activities as organized crime underscores the seriousness of paper leaks and related offenses, making them punishable under stringent legal provisions.

Section 2(1)(n) defines "service provider", as any agency, organization, business entity, or firm engaged by the public examination authority to conduct examinations. This covers IT firms, printing presses, online test platforms, and logistical partners responsible for ensuring the smooth administration of exams. By including service providers under its ambit, the Act ensures accountability at multiple levels,

preventing malpractices originating from third-party contractors or outsourced agencies.⁹⁰¹

Additionally, the definition of "public examination centre" is crucial, as it refers to any premises selected for conducting exams, including schools, computer centres, institutions, or other designated buildings. This definition extends beyond just the physical examination hall to include the entire periphery used for security and exam-related activities, ensuring strict vigilance around these premises. This comprehensive approach helps in preventing unauthorized access, cheating, and security breaches in and around examination centers.

In summary, these definitions provide a clear and structured framework for interpreting the Act's provisions. By precisely identifying key terms such as public examination, unfair means, organized crime, service providers, and examination centers, the law ensures that its implementation remains effective, consistent, and free from legal ambiguities. These definitions also help in establishing responsibilities for various stakeholders, ensuring a holistic approach to curbing examination malpractice in India.

4.1.2 Unfair Means and Offences under the Act

The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 establishes a robust legal framework to combat paper leaks and other forms of examination malpractice. It clearly defines unfair means, offences, and corresponding liabilities for individuals, institutions, and service providers involved in public examinations. The provisions aim to deter organized cheating, ensure accountability, and uphold the credibility of competitive examinations.

Unfair Means in Public Examinations

Under Section 3 of the Act a detailed description outlines all unfair means which include different fraudulent practices that affect exam integrity. Different types of fraudulent activities which

⁸⁹⁹ The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, s 2(1)(k)

⁹⁰⁰ The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, s 2(1)(h)

⁹⁰¹ The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, s 2(1)(n)

occur through individual or group or institutional practices maintain either monetary advantages or wrongful gain activities fall under this definition. These include:

1. The disclosure of examination papers or response keys to unauthorized persons until the completion of the exam results in severe disciplinary action.
2. Individuals and groups who work together for leaking exam materials or result manipulation or conduct fake examinations.
3. Any use of unauthorized help by candidates during examinations extends to impersonation and both authorized and unauthorized communication tools or external solutions.
4. Tampering Answer Sheets combined with any manipulation of Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) sheets along with assessment records for score manipulation violates the exam rules.
5. The offense of tampering with computer systems along with networks and examination platforms through the internet is classified as an unfair means under the law.
6. All threats including coercion along with physical intimidation or wrongful restraint or obstruction against examination officials or service providers or government agencies are subject to prosecution
7. The practice of conducting fraudulent exams, issuing fake admit cards, or misleading candidates through fraudulent websites for monetary gain is classified as an offence.

By defining unfair means, law ensures stringent mechanism to identify and penalize various forms of malpractice that have historically plagued the Indian examination system.⁹⁰²

Conspiracy for Unfair Means (Section 4): Section 4 of the law forbids collaborations

among individuals for conducting exam misconduct. Any collective attempts at cheating or manipulation of public examinations or unfair means inside them remain forbidden to all individuals together with groups and institutions. This sections criminalises conspiracy and collusion.⁹⁰³

he Public Examination Disruption clause (Section 5) would never allow any bystander that was not supposed to be there, or the person with the intention of disrupting the examination process to enter the examination centre. Among unauthorized personnel, only the ones who intended to disrupt the normal flow of the process are seen as the violators. In addition, any exam official or staff member who accesses, leaks, possesses, or attempts to solve a question paper before the scheduled time is in violation of the law.⁹⁰⁴ Persons who are entrusted with this task must be held accountable for doing this if they take part in making this operation a direct violation of this law. No examiner is advised to reveal any of the secrets behind the examination to persons other than those who will gain through their misuse.

Reporting of Offences (Section 6): Section 6 of the Act requires examination service providers along with all stakeholders to notify law enforcement authorities about all cases of unfair practices. Law requires the service provider to notify both police services and examination authority whenever a violation occurs under sections 3, 4 or 5.⁹⁰⁵ In case of a situation where the service provider itself is involved in any unfair practices then the examination authority must take responsibility for reporting the unfair practice issue. This provision ensures accountability at all levels and prevents external agencies, coaching centres, or internal officials from manipulating examinations.

Unauthorized Use of Premises (Section 7) strictly prohibits public examinations from

⁹⁰³ The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, s 4

⁹⁰⁴ The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, s 5

⁹⁰⁵ The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, s 6

⁹⁰² The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, s 3

taking place at any location for which they not have any official authorization. The official examination centers hold the only authorized spaces to conduct exams per Section 7 and any unauthorized use of premises constitutes a punishable offense without written consent first.⁹⁰⁶ Service providers along with individuals become responsible for examination administration at locations not authorized by authorities. A force majeure event qualifies for exception because it allows essential changes to examination centers in cases of natural disasters or emergencies.

Offences by Service Providers and Other Persons (Section 8): The act also provided that Service providers along with their staff members who practice examination dishonesty become legally responsible under Offences by Service Providers and Other Persons (Section 8) and can be held liable. The act doesn't limit the liability to only service providers but extends beyond under the act. All personnel linked to service providers who take part in any unfair practices become legally responsible under the law.⁹⁰⁷ Service providers are subject to various consequences because of their failure to report paper leaks together with unauthorized assistance and exam fraud. All service providers must take reasonable steps to protect their examinations from unauthorized changes because directors and managers at the service provider remain responsible if they knowingly commit acts of fraud. These officials would escape liability only if they can prove that they were not aware of such offences and that they took all necessary precautions to avoid such situation.

4.1.3 Punishment and Penalties under the Act

Cognizable Offences (Section 9) Section 9 states that all the classes of offences under this Act are cognizable, non ambailable and non-compoundable. In other words, law enforcement authorities are at liberty to arrest persons committing such offences without the prior approval of the Magistrate and bail is not

as a matter of right in such cases. Additionally, these offences cannot be settled through compromise between the parties involved.⁹⁰⁸

Section 10 related to Penalties for Individuals, prescribes the imprisonment can be from three years to five years with a fine up to ten lakh rupees. In case the offender does not pay the fine, the offender shall be further imprisoned as per the provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.⁹⁰⁹

Additionally, if a service provider is found guilty, it will be liable to a fine of up to one crore rupees, and the proportionate cost of conducting the examination shall also be recovered.⁹¹⁰ Furthermore, the service provider will be barred from participating in the conduct of any public examination for a period of four years. If the offence is committed with the consent or connivance of a director, senior management official, or any person in charge of the service provider firm, that individual shall be punished with imprisonment for a term of no less than three years, which may extend to ten years, along with a fine of one crore rupees. Failure to pay the fine will result in additional imprisonment as per the provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (45 of 2023). However, an accused official may avoid liability if they can prove that the offence was committed without their knowledge and that they exercised due diligence to prevent it.

Organised Crimes (Section 11) deals with large-scale examination malpractices committed by individuals, groups, or institutions. The person, group of person or institution whether examination authority/ service provider or any other institution has been found guilty of being involved in the organized crimes with respect to public examinations shall be sentenced to imprisonment for a term not less than five years and up to ten years and also is liable to fine of not less than one crores. If, however, the fine is

⁹⁰⁸ The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, s 9

⁹⁰⁹ The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, s 10

⁹¹⁰ 'Anti-Paper Leak Law for Exams Comes into Effect Amid NEET, UGC NET Row' *The Economic Times* (India, 10 April 2024) <<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/anti-paper-leak-law-for-exams-comes-into-effect-amid-neet-ugc-net-row/articleshow/111180074.cms>> accessed 25 March 2025

⁹⁰⁶ The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, s 7

⁹⁰⁷ The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, s 8

not paid, then the provision of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (45 of 2023) will provide for further imprisonment, as the situation demands.⁹¹¹ Moreover, if an institution is has somehow become involved in organized crime, its property shall be searched, attached and forfeited and the institution will have to pay for the proportionate cost of carrying out the examination. These tough provisions are designed to cool down the practice of big scale examination fraud and to make each corner accountable.

4.1.4 Inquiry and investigation under the Act

Inquiry and Investigation under Section 12 outlines the authorities that would be responsible for investigating offences under this Act. According to this provision, if any offence committed under this Act shall be investigated by an officer not below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) or Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP).⁹¹² This section ensures that only experienced and senior law enforcement officials handle such cases and maintains the seriousness as well as the integrity of the examination and the investigation. Additionally, the Central Government has the authority to refer any case for investigation to a Central Investigating Agency and overriding the jurisdiction of any local law enforcement. This provision strengthens the central's government's ability to handle large-scale as well as complex examination-related crimes by ensuring that cases involving organized malpractice or inter-state implications are thoroughly and efficiently investigated.

4.1.5 Miscellaneous provision

Public Servant Status and Legal Protection (Sections 13 & 14): according to the section the chairman, members, officers and employees of the public examination authority shall be deemed as the public servant under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (or the Indian Penal Code, 1860, until the new law is in force).

However, they are given the protection from legal proceeding for action that they have taken under good faith while performing their official duties.⁹¹³

Legal Supremacy and Rulemaking (Sections 15, 16 & 17): The provisions of this Act provides that in addition to other laws and will override any conflicting laws. The Central Government has the power to frame rules for the implementation the Act which includes covering the procedures for conducting exams and other related matters in the act. Any rules made must be presented before Parliament for approval within 30 days and can be modified or annulled if both Houses agree.

Power to Remove Difficulties (Section 18): eating provides that if any difficulty arises while implementing the act, the central government may issue necessary orders within three years. However they must not be inconsistent with the act. Such orders by the central government must be laid before both the houses of Parliament for the review.⁹¹⁴

5. Implications of the Law

The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act of 2024, widely known as the Anti-Paper Leak Law, was enacted to curb the growing menace of examination malpractices, especially paper leaks, in public examinations. The law primarily benefits central agencies like the UPSC, NTA, and SSC by imposing stricter monitoring mechanisms and harsher penalties, including imprisonment of up to 10 years and fines up to ₹1 crore. This aims to deter organized crime networks and individuals involved in exam fraud. By focusing punishment on actual perpetrators rather than innocent candidates, the law promotes fairness. For example, the NEET-UG 2024 cancellation highlighted how leaks can unfairly affect sincere students. The law attempts to shift accountability toward institutions and culprits, protecting honest aspirants from systemic failures.

⁹¹¹ The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, s 11

⁹¹² The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, s 12

⁹¹³ The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, s 13 & 14

⁹¹⁴ The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, s 18

Furthermore, the Act is expected to lead to significant institutional reforms, mandating greater accountability and the adoption of advanced technologies such as encrypted digital question papers and biometric verification. Such measures could prevent large-scale leaks like the ones repeatedly seen in Rajasthan, where 26 paper leak cases were recorded between 2011 and 2022. Strengthening examination processes enhances the credibility of both academic and public service recruitment systems, restoring trust in institutions like the UPSC.

However, despite these advantages, the law is not free from challenges. Implementation across India's vast and unevenly governed education landscape is a major hurdle, especially in states with limited administrative resources. Without clear enforcement guidelines and protective mechanisms for whistleblowers, there's a risk of misuse. Moreover, the law's central focus leaves out state-level and private examinations, making its protection patchy. States like Bihar, with known histories of cheating scandals, may remain vulnerable unless similar laws are enacted locally.

Legal complexities also hinder the Act's effectiveness. Proving intent or negligence in court requires substantial evidence, and vague definitions of terms like "unfair means" can be exploited by the accused. The law must be supported by stronger investigative frameworks, including digital forensic units, to be truly impactful. Additionally, while the law aims to protect students, cancellations due to suspected leaks, like in REET 2023, can lead to mental and financial distress, especially for underprivileged students. Lastly, over-reliance on punishment without addressing systemic academic pressures may make the approach seem more retributive than reformative. Therefore, while the law is a significant step forward, it must be paired with holistic reforms to ensure long-term success.

Conclusion

The Anti-Paper Leak Law of 2024 marks a landmark effort to combat corruption in public examinations and restore trust in India's competitive selection systems. By enforcing strict penalties for malpractice, it reaffirms constitutional rights such as equality (Article 14), equal opportunity in public employment (Article 16), and the right to education (Article 21A). These rights are compromised when examination fraud advantages a few and undermines the merit-based system.

Beyond legality, paper leaks pose serious ethical issues—eroding values like fairness and honesty. In Indian tradition, the concept of *Dharma* calls for integrity and responsible governance. Hence, ethical education and civic responsibility must be emphasized early, and whistleblower protections should be enhanced.

Effective governance is essential for the law's success. This includes autonomous oversight bodies, AI-driven monitoring, fast-track courts, accountability of officials, and collaboration with tech firms for secure digital systems. Real-time monitoring and blockchain-based paper distribution could help prevent fraud.

Public examinations are crucial for upward mobility, especially for marginalized communities. Exam fraud undermines trust in governance and allows unworthy candidates into public service, harming institutions like healthcare, law enforcement, and administration.

Despite its promise, challenges remain—judicial delays, political interference, cyber threats, and poor coordination among agencies. Solutions include AI surveillance, independent investigative bodies, minimum sentencing, and the formation of a National Examination Security Task Force.

In essence, the Anti-Paper Leak Law must be more than just legislation—it requires active public participation, institutional reform, and cultural change. If implemented successfully, it can become a global model, ensuring fairness

and preserving the dreams of millions who strive for success through honest means. A credible examination system is foundational to good governance and a just society.

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