

Exam leak fear forces 2m aspiring doctors in India to resit

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Delhi

More than 2 million aspiring Indian doctors have sat one of the world's toughest entrance exams for a second time after an alleged question paper leak forced authorities to scrap the original test results.

To ensure the exam's security, students arriving at test centres yesterday were greeted by airport-style security. They were frisked, scanned, checked biometrically and made to pass through metal detectors while police and paramilitary personnel stood guard outside.

For many students, the retest turned an already gruelling ordeal into a nightmare. A news anchor, Rajdeep Sardesai, posted on X: "One can only imagine the trauma each of you have gone through in the past few months."

One student said: "Thousands of students are emotionally exhausted after this long process. We are trying our best, but many of us are struggling mentally."

The test is the gateway to India's medical colleges, where only about 5-6% of candidates secure a coveted place. Many spend years preparing, attending expensive coaching classes and studying for long hours in the hope of making the cut.

India's education minister, Dharmendra Pradhan, promised a "fair and transparent" retest, while the government has opened a sweeping



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PHOTOGRAPH: NASIR KACHROO/NURPHOTO; SHUTTERSTOCK

investigation into the alleged questions leak last month. People at demonstrations have demanded his resignation.

One candidate, Tarun, posted on X: "I did well but let's see. The exam was tougher than last time."

The scandal led the government last week to temporarily suspend access to Telegram, one of India's most popular messaging apps, after reports that leaked questions for the fresh exam were being sold on the

platform. The ban drew criticism from internet free-speech advocates, but on Friday the company lost a court challenge when judges ruled the ban was justified.

The medical test scandal is one of a long list of examination controversies that have shaken confidence in India's vast testing machinery, which determines access to universities and government jobs for tens of millions of people each year and holds the promise of upward mobility for many.

This month, more than 400,000 students applied for copies of their test papers amid an outcry over marking errors in the country's most important school-leaving exam after the introduction of a new digital scoring system. Teachers said when they were marking the exams, they were often still figuring out the software.

The Indian Express newspaper asked why authorities "spend heavily on damage control instead of planning for prevention".

Into the row has stepped a new Indian satirical group calling itself the Cockroach Janata party (CJP), a play on the ruling Bharatiya Janata party's name. The CJP has become a lightning rod for frustration among students over exam glitches and lack of jobs for young people.

Abhijeet Dipke, a social media creator and CJP founder, said: "This failure cannot go ignored. There must be consequences." The movement has amassed more than 22 million Instagram followers.

can republish after a six-month stay but instead they were involuntarily discharged, banned from work and voting, and housed in places such as the former Nazi transit camp Westerbork. A republic never came.

At the unveiling ceremony for a crowd-funded national monument on the harbourside in Rotterdam, where their last boat arrived, Jetten said: "For their heartless and dishonourable discharge as soldiers, for their inadequate reception and housing, for being unseen and abandoned, for the unfulfilled longing for home, for the grief and pain in so many Moluccan families.

"For this, I offer apologies today on behalf of the Dutch government. It is not only high time, but it is also necessary if we want to move forward."

Activism by the descendants of those Moluccan families in the 1970s - including a school hostage-taking and an armed train hijack - ended in a bloody raid by Dutch special forces.

Jetten stressed that a forthcoming parliamentary investigation, involving the community that now numbers 70,000 descendants, was vital.

Carola Schouten, the mayor of Rotterdam, said she hoped the monument would be a place for stories to be told openly. "It is important that there is recognition of the injustice that was done to you," she said at the ceremony.

Eduard Latuheri, 98, was invited to bless the monument, with several other surviving soldiers. His grandson Dennis van Peterson spoke for Latuheri. "He is thankful just to come here," he told the Guardian. "There's a mixed feeling about an apology. For Grandad, it's the right thing, but the first generation are mostly not here any more - it's too late."

Others recalled the lifelong bitterness of their parents over the broken promise from the Dutch government to help them return. Fred Roos, 70, was born and lived for five years in Westerbork and said his late father always felt angry. "Everything was always ready to go back but it never happened," he said. "This is a loaded moment."