

India's med school hopefuls struggle with stress in exam retakes

NEW DELHI: If sitting one of India's most difficult exams wasn't trying enough, more than 2 million medical school candidates are now experiencing severe stress as they have to do it again on Sunday through no fault of their own. They initially sat the exam on May 3 but authorities ended up scrapping the results after allegations on social media that there had been leaks of the question paper in advance.

Only 5 percent to 6 percent of students taking the exam, known as the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test, secure seats at medical schools. "This examination drains us mentally. We put in years of hard work, and then the paper gets leaked and results are cancelled," said Alima Javed, a 20-year-old student from Srinagar who plans to resist the test. The controversy has triggered a slew of student protests in New Delhi and other cities, with hundreds of students turning out per demonstration, becoming a political headache for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration.

Some media and opposition politicians have also asserted that the debacle has led to some student suicides, though such claims are difficult to verify.

Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has said authorities will ensure a "fair and transparent" re-test. To that end, the government has ordered a temporary block on the messaging app Telegram until the exam is over, though that move has drawn criticism from free speech activists.

On Friday, Telegram lost its bid to overturn the ban, with an Indian court ruling that the government's actions were legal and reasonable. The block only affected Telegram, with the government arguing that the app represented a unique case, citing its anonymity features and its easy recreation of blocked channels. Authorities have launched a multi-agency probe into the alleged leak, with investigators seeking to pin down its origin and examining financial transactions linked to suspected cheating networks. — Reuters