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ANALYSIS**



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1 - Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill 2024:

GS II

Government Policies and Interventions

- **Context:**

- Aiming to "bring greater transparency, fairness and credibility to the Public Examinations System," the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024 was recently filed in the Lok Sabha.
- In addition, the Bill will play a crucial role as "a model draft for States to adopt at their discretion" once it becomes law.

- **Why Is Such a Bill Necessary?**

- **Examples of Question Paper Disclosures:**

- In recent years, there have been numerous instances of question paper leaks during recruitment exams all throughout the nation.
- Over the previous five years, there have been at least 48 cases of paper leaks in 16 states that have interfered with the hiring process for government positions.
- For roughly 1.2 lakh vacancies, the breaches affected the lives of at least 1.51 crore applicants.

- **Exam delays are caused by malpractices:**

- Examinees' prospects are negatively impacted by examination delays and cancellations caused by malpractice in public examinations, which affects millions of young people.
- There isn't yet a clear substantive legislation that addresses unfair tactics used or transgressions committed.
- Enacting comprehensive central legislation is essential to identifying and mitigating aspects that exploit weaknesses inside the examination system.

- **To Promote Increased Openness:**

- The purpose of the Bill is to ensure that public examination systems are more transparent, equitable, and credible. It also aims to reassure young people that their efforts will be duly acknowledged and that their future is secure.

- The purpose of the bill is to effectively and legally dissuade individuals, organisations, or organisations who engage in different unfair practices and negatively affect public examination processes in order to profit monetarily or unlawfully.
- **Which are the Bill's Principal Provisions?**
- **What Is a Public Examination?**
- Any examination carried out by a "public examination authority" specified in the Bill's Schedule or by any other authority that the Central Government may notify is considered a public examination under Section 2(k).
- Five public examination authorities are listed on the schedule: the National Testing Agency (NTA), the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS), the Railway Recruitment Boards (RRBs), the Staff Selection Commission (SSC), and the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).
- The Common University Entrance Test (CUET), NEET-UG, UGC-NET, and JEE (Main) are administered by NTA.
- The new rule will also apply to all "Ministries or Departments of the Central Government and their attached and subordinate offices for staff recruitment," in addition to these specified public examination agencies.
- When necessary, the central government may notify the addition of new authority to the timetable.
- **Penalties:**
- All offences will be cognizable, non-bailable, and non-compoundable, according to Section 9 of the Bill.
- Police are required to look into cases involving cognizable violations without the magistrate's consent.
- An offence that is not compoundable means that even after the complainant and the accused have reached a settlement, the matter cannot be dropped and a trial is required.
- It implies that an arrest can be made without a warrant and that granting bail will not be a matter of right; rather, the accused's suitability for release on bond would be decided by a magistrate.
- "Any person or persons resorting to unfair means and offences" may be punished with a fine of up to Rs 10 lakh in addition to three to five years in prison.
- "An additional punishment of imprisonment shall be imposed, in accordance with the provisions of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita, 2023," if the convicted party fails to pay the fine.
- **Penalties for the Service Suppliers:**

- A service provider hired by the public examination authority to administer exams may also face penalties of up to Rs 1 crore in addition to having the examination costs recovered from it in proportion, should the service provider engage in unethical behaviour.
- **What Is an Unfair Mean?**
- At least fifteen acts are listed in Section 3 of the Bill as constituting the use of unfair techniques in public examinations for the purpose of monetary or unlawful benefit.
- These offences include giving answers to questions by any unauthorised individual during a public exam, leaking question papers, answer keys, or portions of them, and obtaining question papers or OMR response sheets without authorization.
- The section also lists the following as illegal acts: creating a fake website, issuing fake offer letters or admit cards to cheat or for financial gain, tampering with any document required for shortlisting candidates or determining the merit or rank of a candidate.
- **Examining and Implementing:**
- According to the bill, personnel holding the rank of Assistant Commissioner of Police or Deputy Superintendent of Police must conduct investigations into any offences covered by the proposed law.
- **State-specific Model Draft:**
- In order to support states in preventing criminal elements from interfering with the conduct of their state-level public examinations, the law also functions as a model draft that states may choose to follow.
- **High-Level National Technical Committee:**
- Establishing a National Technical Committee at a High Level for Public Examinations.
- The creation of digital platform security protocols will be the committee's main priority. It will create plans for putting in place impenetrable IT security measures.
- The committee will create national IT and physical infrastructure standards and service levels. These guidelines will be used to administer exams in a reliable and efficient manner.
- **What worries about the bill are there?**
- **At the State Governments' discretion:**
- Although the measure is intended to be a model that states can follow, the latitude granted to state governments may result in differing implementations in other states.

- This might make the law less effective in stopping unfair examination practices in public.
- **Exploitable Sanctions Loopholes:**
 - There could be ways to go around the bill's provisions, like the punishment for offenders, in order to avoid facing criminal penalties.
 - For instance, a fine levied on a service provider might not be a strong enough deterrence if it is not proportionate to the money they make through dishonest means.
- **Insufficient Definition on the National Technical Committee:**
 - Although the bill suggests creating a High-Level National Technical Committee on Public Examinations, its purpose, membership, and qualifications are not made clear.
 - Without precise criteria about the makeup and credentials of committee members, questions about their objectivity and experience in creating national standards for exam conduct and impenetrable IT security systems may arise.
- **Possibility of Legal Challenges:**
 - Due to its provisions on the cognizability, non-bailability, and non-compoundability of offences, the law may encounter legal problems. There may be disagreements over whether or not these harsh penalties are appropriate given the seriousness of the crimes and if natural justice principles are followed.
 - Although the bill establishes procedures for selected law enforcement authorities to investigate and enforce, thorough supervision mechanisms are required to guarantee accountability and transparency in the examination process.
 - This entails keeping an eye on how exams are administered, responding to complaints, and evaluating examination protocols to successfully identify and stop malpractices.

Source → The Hindu

2 - India's Examination System Needs Rethinking:

GS II

Government Policies and Interventions

- **Context:**
- Exam season is approaching, thus the conversation about India's examination system is getting more heated. People are pointing out problems with it and suggesting solutions to fix it.
- **What are the problems with India's examination system?**
- **Lesser Secondary Education and School-Leaving Examinations:**
 - In the later half of the 1800s, the school-leaving exam was created as a means of selecting candidates for lower-level office employment as well as for more schooling, which was in high demand at the time.
 - It served as a kind of elimination. And up to this point, things have been that way. For example, many children fail the Grade 10 exam, which prevents them from continuing.
 - In a system where secondary education is not particularly common and higher secondary education is much less common, there is this type of structural organisation. There are also not many options for pursuing undergraduate studies or several forms of technical education.
- **The fallacy of equal opportunity:**
 - All pupils take the same three-hour test in the exam, regardless of their background.
 - Since the identity of the paper setters and evaluators is kept a secret, confidentiality strengthens the credibility of a system in which kids from all backgrounds are afforded equal opportunities.
- **Puts Competition Before Understanding:**
 - The educational system in India places more emphasis on competitiveness than comprehension, which promotes rote memory over real knowledge.
 - Moreover, the situation is made worse by the way curricula and institutions are structured, which leaves little opportunity for inquiry and comprehensive learning.

- **Extremely stressful and competitive:**

- When compared to other societies' evaluation and assessment systems, such as those in China, Europe, and North America, India's examination system performs terribly.
- By helping instructors better grasp what qualities to look for in a child from the beginning, they have revolutionised their evaluation systems from the inside out.
- The Indian educational system immediately adopts a very competitive and stressful atmosphere, endorsing cramming as a means of achieving academic success.

- **Inadequate Academic Facilities:**

- Many of the Boards lack the necessary academic faculty and staff to adequately oversee their own operations. The academic infrastructure of a large number of State Boards is actually in very bad condition.
- Even the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) and Central Board of School Education (CBSE) function as bureaucratic, mechanical setups, which may degrade the standard of examination procedures.

- **What Steps Can Be Taken to Change the Indian Exam System?**

- **Handling Dysfunction in Institutions:**

- Exam boards have systemic flaws that must be acknowledged and fixed, including a lack of staff and inadequate infrastructure.
- Give top priority to developing academic staff and administrative skills in order to guarantee efficient monitoring and assessment procedures.
- To maintain the highest standards of justice and integrity, examination boards must cultivate a culture of openness and responsibility.

- **Whole-hearted Curriculum Reform:**

- Simplify and rationalise the curriculum while maintaining coherence and depth of content to meet the needs and interests of a wide range of learners.
- It is imperative to prioritise the cultivation of critical thinking abilities, problem-solving techniques, and practical application of knowledge over mere memorization.
- Incorporate multidisciplinary teaching strategies that foster comprehensive comprehension and transferable skills.

- **Adaptable Evaluation Techniques:**

- Modular test formats that enable students to show mastery of various subjects over a longer period of time are required.
- Replace high-stakes, one-size-fits-all exams with a more complex evaluation system that places an emphasis on lifelong learning and development.
- To enable individualised learning trajectories, offer chances for formative assessment and feedback at various points during the learning process.

- **Educators' Professional Development:**

- To help educators gain a deeper understanding of pedagogical concepts and assessment processes, comprehensive training programmes must be funded.
- Encourage instructors to work together and exchange knowledge in order to cultivate an innovative and continuous improvement culture.
- Provide educators with the instruments and materials they need to apply learner-centered strategies and successfully meet the requirements of a diverse student body.

- **Comprehensive Assessment Standards:**

- Increase the scope of the evaluation criteria for student success to include more competencies, such as emotional intelligence, creativity, and teamwork.
- Create alternate forms of assessment, such projects, portfolios, and presentations, to better reflect the complex nature of student success.
- Promote a change to assessments that are authentic, contextually relevant, and reflective of possibilities and difficulties found in the real world.
- The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) will play a role in school education in 2023.
- Through commensurate beneficial improvements in the curriculum, including pedagogy, it seeks to contribute to the positive transformation of the Indian school education system as envisioned in NEP 2020.
- It seeks to realise the best possible education for every child in line with the Indian Constitution's vision of a pluralistic, inclusive, and egalitarian society.

- **Which steps have been done to change the educational system?**

- The 2009 Right to Education Act.
- 2020's New Education Policy.
- The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).
- The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan..
- RUSA stands for Rashtriya Uchhatar Shiksha Abhiyan.

- Framework for National Curriculum.
- Through the implementation of a comprehensive strategy that tackles the structural, pedagogical, and cultural aspects of the examination system, India can lead the way towards an education system that is inclusive, equitable, and empowers all students to reach their full potential.
- In order to implement significant reforms that put students' holistic development and wellbeing first and create the groundwork for future generations to have better opportunities, it is essential that stakeholders work together in a proactive manner.

Source → The Hindu

3 - Mera Gaon, Meri Dharohar Scheme:

GS II

Government Policies and Interventions

- **Context:**
- Under the Mera Gaon, Meri Dharohar (MGMD) Programme, the Indian government has made the decision to map and catalogue every village.
- The program's goal is to gather in-depth data about the customs, history, and way of life of Indian villages and make it accessible to both online and in-person visitors.
- Additionally, the Ministry of Culture is putting into practice an eight-component Scheme of Financial Assistance for the Promotion of Art and Culture, which provides funding to cultural groups for the purpose of promoting art and culture.
- **The Mera Gaon, Meri Dharohar (MGMD) Programme: What is it?**
- In collaboration with the Ministry of Culture's Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), the MGMD Programme is a nationwide cultural mapping mission.
- Additionally, an MGMD web site has been launched. With a focus on life, history, and ethos, MGMD seeks to create a comprehensive database about Indian villages that will be available to both virtual and in-person visitors.

- **Information is gathered under the MGMD in seven major categories:**

- Village of Arts and Crafts
- An environmentally conscious village
- Indian Textual and Scriptural Traditions Connected to a Scholastic Village
- Epic Village associated with oral epics, Puranic traditions, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata
- Village with historical connections to the region and the country

- **Heritage Village of Architecture:**

- Any other feature that should be highlighted, such a shepherding village, horticultural village, or fishing village, etc.
- As part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (AKAM), MGMD is a component of the National Mission on Cultural Mapping (NMCM).
- The National Cultural Work Place, the Mission portal, has almost two lakh villages that have already been mapped and uploaded as part of the 6.5 lakh villages that are being culturally mapped under the MGMD.

- **What is the National Mapping Mission for Culture (NMCM)?**

- The Ministry of Culture established NMCM with the goal of identifying and cataloguing India's rich cultural legacy as well as its creative potential to revive rural economies and help Village India become self-sufficient.

- **Three layers will be operational for the Cultural Mapping:**

- National Directories of Cultural Industries' Living Treasures: Artists.
- establishment of artist communities and tradition-bearers, as well as national digital inventories and registers of artistic expression.
- Create welfare programmes for artists and policies that support the maintenance of artistic practices.

- **Mandate for Mission:**

- to use cultural mapping to build a national database with the help of thorough fieldwork and documentation.
- To conserve, defend, revive, and share this nation's rich cultural legacy with the next generation.
- To establish a robust "Cultural Vibrancy" across the country through the utilisation of digital channels and outreach initiatives.

- **What is the Financial Assistance Scheme for the Promotion of Culture and Art?**

- It is a central sector programme designed to assist the nation's many cultural organisations and events. There are eight components in the system, each with a distinct financing allocation and goal.
- The eight components that make up the Financial Assistance for the Promotion of Art and Culture plan are as follows:

- **Financial Support for Nationally Recognised Cultural Organisations:**

- Give money to well-known cultural institutions that are present around the country in order to help them spread and promote art and culture.
- This grant is provided to organisations that meet the requirements for being properly constituted managing bodies registered in India with an All India Character, have a sufficient number of employees, and have demonstrated that they have spent at least Rs. 1 crore on cultural activities over the course of the last three of the previous five years.
- Grant Maximum: Up to one crore rupees.

- **Grant for Cultural Function and Production (CFPG):**

- Give money to a range of cultural events, such as workshops, conferences, research, festivals, exhibitions, and productions.
- Maximum Grant: Rs. 5 lakh, with an extension possible to Rs. 20 lakh in special cases.

- **Financial Support for the Development & Preservation of the Himalayan Region's Cultural Heritage:**

- Encourage and protect the Himalayan region's cultural legacy through education, outreach, and research.
- Funding: Up to Rs. 30 lakhs under extraordinary circumstances, with an annual maximum of Rs. 10 lakhs for an organisation.
- Assist monasteries and other volunteer Buddhist/Tibetan organisations in preserving and advancing their respective cultures.
- Funding: Up to Rs. 1 crore in extraordinary circumstances, with an annual cap of Rs. 30 lakhs for an organisation.

- **Financial Support for Studio Theatres and Other Building Grants:**

- Donate money to fund the construction of cultural infrastructure, including rehearsal spaces, auditoriums, and studio theatres.
- Maximum Grant: In metro areas, up to Rs. 50 lakh; in non-metro areas, up to Rs. 25 lakh.
- **Supporting Funds For Related Cultural Activities:**
 - Assist organisations in developing resources to improve audio-visual displays for cultural events such as festivals and significant occasions.
 - Maximum Support: Rs. 1 crore for audio, Rs. 1.50 crore for audio+video.
- **Plan for Preserving Intangible Cultural Assets:**
 - The Ministry of Culture introduced this programme in 2013 with the goal of promoting and revitalising India's varied cultural traditions and intangible cultural heritage.
- **National Celebrations and Expos:**
 - Helping to organise the Ministry of Culture's "Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsavs" is the aim of this project.

Source → *The Hindu*

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4 – Fiscal Deficit:

GS III

Indian Economy

- **Context:**
 - India's fiscal deficit will be reduced to 5.1% of GDP in 2024–25, according to the Ministry of Finance's Interim Budget 2024–25, in light of the country's financial struggles in managing its national debt.
- Fiscal Deficit: What Is It?
- A government's shortfall in revenue over expenditure is referred to as a fiscal deficit.

- When a government's spending exceeds its income, it must sell assets or borrow money to close the budget gap.
- The primary source of funding for any government is taxes. The government expects to collect Rs 26.02 lakh crore in taxes year 2024–25, while its overall revenue is projected to be Rs 30.8 lakh crore.
- On the other side, when a government has a fiscal surplus, its income surpass its expenses.
- Governments do not, however, often run in surplus. These days, the majority of governments prioritise controlling the fiscal deficit over creating a fiscal surplus or balancing the budget.

- **Forecasts:**

- As stated in Budget 2021–2022, government projections indicate that the fiscal deficit would be reduced to less than 4.5% of GDP by 2025–2026.
- Additionally, the government's updated projections reduced the budget deficit estimate for 2023–2024 to 5.8% of GDP.

- **The National Debt and the Fiscal Deficit:**

- The entire amount of money owed by a nation's government to its lenders at any given time is known as the national debt.
- The term "government debt" refers to a variety of responsibilities, including loans from both domestic and foreign sources as well as commitments to programmes like special securities, provident funds, and modest savings accounts.
- The government's finances are heavily burdened by these commitments, which require principle repayment as well as interest payments.
- It typically refers to the total debt that a government has accrued over a long period of time as a result of running fiscal deficits and taking on debt to cover such deficits.
- It is less probable that a government's lenders will be paid back without issue the larger its fiscal deficit as a percentage of GDP.
- Larger economies have the capacity to run greater fiscal deficits. Leading deficit holders as of 2022 were South Africa (4.8%), Spain (4.7%), France (4.7%), Italy (7-8%), and Hungary (6.3%).

- **National Debt Trends:**

- The debt-to-GDP ratio was 84.4% in 2003–04, and it has since fluctuated between rising and falling under several governments.
- Following 2014, there was an increase in the government's debt-to-GDP ratio, which peaked in 2020–21 at 88.5%. This increase was mostly the result of the Covid-19 Pandemic's negative economic effects.
- Even with modest reductions in the following fiscal years, the ratio is still high—it is expected to reach 82.4% in 2024–2025—and presents serious difficulties for fiscal management.

- Total Expenditure - Total Receipts (not including borrowings) equals the fiscal deficit.
 - Revenue Deficit: The total revenue collected less the entire amount spent on revenue is the government's or company's revenue deficit.
 - Total revenue received minus total revenue spent equals the revenue deficit.
 - The debt to GDP ratio calculates the amount of debt a country has relative to its GDP.
 - $\text{Total Debt} / \text{Total GDP of the Country} = \text{Debt to GDP}$
- **How is the Fiscal Deficit of the Government Funded?**
- **Utilising Bond Market Borrowing:**
- The government primarily borrows money via the bond market, where lenders compete to lend to the government by buying government-issued bonds, in order to cover its budget deficit.
 - The Centre plans to pay its spending in 2024–25 through increased GST collections, therefore it expects to borrow a gross amount of Rs 14.13 lakh crore from the market in 2024–25—less than its borrowing goal for 2023–24.
 - A government's borrowing costs increase when its finances deteriorate because less people want to buy its bonds, which forces the government to offer lenders a higher interest rate.
- **The Reserve Bank of India's role:**
- The RBI is a major player in the credit market and helps the government borrow money indirectly. Central banks participate in Open Market Operations (OMO) to buy government bonds from private lenders in the secondary market, even though they are not permitted to directly purchase government bonds from the primary market.
 - The government's borrowing efforts are effectively supported by this infusion of money provided by central banks.
 - Through the creation of new money, central bank operations through OMO have the ability to eventually expand the money supply and put inflationary pressures on the economy.
- **The Monetary Policy:**
- Lowering the cost of borrowing from the market for governments is another important function of monetary policy.
 - After the epidemic, central bank lending rates—which were previously almost nonexistent in many nations—rose dramatically.
 - Because of this, borrowing becomes more costly for governments, which may be one of the reasons the Centre is eager to reduce its fiscal deficit.
- **What Indian laws are related to fiscal management?**

- **Framework for Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM):**

- Established in 2003, the FRBM Act established aggressive goals for debt reduction, with the goal of bringing the total amount of public debt down to 60% of GDP by 2024–2025.
- Nevertheless, later budgetary paths diverged from these objectives, with the Center's outstanding debt exceeding the initially projected ceilings.
- By 2023, the general (combined) government should have a debt to GDP ratio of 60%, with 40% going to the federal government and 20% going to the state governments, according to the FRBM Review Committee Report.

- **Why Should We Be Concerned About the Fiscal Deficit?**

- **Effect on the Inflation Rate:**

- The nation's inflation rate and the government's budget deficit are closely correlated.
- In the long run, increased inflation can result from a nation's government running a continuously large fiscal deficit since it will need to spend newly issued money from the central bank to cover the shortfall.
- During the pandemic, the fiscal deficit in 2020 peaked at 9.17% of GDP. Since then, it has drastically dropped, and in 2023–2024, it is predicted to reach 5.8%.

- **Fiscal Restraint Raises Scores:**

- Better government financial discipline is indicated by a smaller fiscal deficit. Higher ratings for Indian government bonds may result from this.
- Lender confidence is increased and borrowing costs are reduced when the government depends less on borrowing and more on tax collections.

- **Controlling Public Debt:**

- A large budget deficit may also have a negative impact on the government's capacity to control the nation's total debt.
- The IMF forewarned in December 2023 that risks might cause India's public debt to increase to over 100% of GDP in the medium run.
- Reducing the fiscal deficit could facilitate the government's ability to sell bonds abroad and obtain more affordable financing from the global bond market.

- **What Steps Can India Take to Manage Its National Debt and Fiscal Deficit?**

- **Consolidation and Fiscal Restraint:**

- Respecting the FRBM Act's fiscal consolidation goals is essential.
- To maintain sustainable public finances, the government should strive to progressively lower the fiscal deficit-to-GDP ratio.
- The adoption of prudent fiscal policies, such as rationalisation of expenditures, steps to boost revenue, and reforms to subsidies, can aid in decreasing the dependence on borrowing and addressing fiscal imbalances.

- **Improving The Mobilisation of Revenue:**

- enhancing tax administration and compliance in order to increase tax revenue collection and expand the tax base.
- looking into ways to diversify income streams, such adding additional taxes or levies on wealth, luxury items, or environmental fees.

- **Justifying Expenditure:**

- carrying out a thorough analysis of public spending to spot inefficiencies and prioritise funding for important sectors like infrastructure, healthcare, and education.
- putting policies in place to reduce subsidies and non-essential spending while making sure that needy groups receive targeted assistance.

- **Debt Reduction Techniques:**

- creating a responsible debt management plan to reduce refinancing risks and maximise borrowing costs.
- reducing exposure to market volatility by diversifying the investor base and funding sources, including domestic and foreign markets.

- **Prolonged Structural Adjustments:**

- implementing fundamental changes, such as labour market reforms, attempts to make doing business easier, and governance reforms, with the goal of increasing the economy's efficiency and competitiveness.
- removing obstacles and bottlenecks in industries including manufacturing, services, and agriculture in order to maximise development potential and improve fiscal sustainability.

- India can proficiently handle its national debt and fiscal deficit through the implementation of a range of Fiscal Consolidation policies, so guaranteeing fiscal sustainability, economic expansion, and sustained prosperity.
- To achieve sustainable budgetary outcomes, however, a balance between short-term stabilisation initiatives and long-term structural reforms is needed.

Source → The Hindu



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