Changes to Entrance Examinations

Why in news?

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- The government recently announced the setting up of the National Testing Agency (NTA).
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- It also announced a change in the structure of JEE and NEET examinations.
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What are these exams for?

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- The Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) (Mains) is for admission to National Institutes of Technology, Indian Institutes of Information Technology, etc.
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- It is also the eligibility to appear for JEE (Advanced) for admission to the Indian Institutes of Technology.
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- NEET decides admissions to all medical colleges except AIIMS and JIPMER, Puducherry.
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What are the proposed changes?

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- **Exams** - The JEE (Mains) and NEET will be conducted twice a year.
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- The same student can take these examinations twice a year.
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- The two tests would be equated using psychometric methods, standardisation techniques.
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- The best of the equated scores would thus be used for the admissions.
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- However, the IITs will continue to conduct the JEE (Advanced) and this is likely to be held just once a year.
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- **NTA** - The new National Testing Agency (NTA) would conduct these examinations.
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- The NTA will start conducting the JEE (Mains), NEET, UGC NET, CMAT and GPAT examinations from this year itself.
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- This would reduce the burden of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE).
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- **Computer-based** - All these examinations will be computer-based, though not online.
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- The papers have to be downloaded at the test centres just before the exam.
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- After downloading, the Internet would be disconnected.
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- The papers would then be distributed to all candidates through a local server.
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- After the exam, the papers would be uploaded to central servers.
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- There would be encryption, and this ensures foolproof testing.
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- **Student-friendly** - There would be no examiners and the answers would be fed into the system.
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- So a candidate would know her raw score immediately.
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- The result would come out after some days to address any possible complaints.
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- Examinations will be held on a number of days, with multiple question papers with equal level of difficulty.
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- A candidate can choose which date to appear for the exam.
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- All the examinations would be held in all the existing languages with no change in syllabus.
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- Those who did not have a computer or laptop at home could practise at

authorised centres.
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What are the benefits?

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- **NTA** - There had been concerns of paper leaks, cheating scandals, outdated syllabus, etc with the CBSE.
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- The National Testing Agency is thus likely to address these shortfalls.
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- A professional agency could make the selection criteria more objective and assess the candidate's suitability.
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- Moreover, curbs on commercialisation can help expand higher education.
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- **Two tests** - Taking the better of the two scores and offering more days on which the exam is held would help the students.
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- This may lower the pressure that students encounter and address exam related suicides to an extent.
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- **Process** - Computer-based exam process would bring in more flexibility, less stress and a more transparent process.
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- It would be on par with international norms, be student- friendly, open, scientific and leak-proof.
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What are the concerns, measures and challenges therein?

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- **Method** The real issue with the entrance system is the examination itself.
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- The JEE, NEET or NET should be reduced to a score that counts towards the admission process.
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- It should not be the single deciding factor.
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- **Trust** - The government could consider allowing the institutions to design

their own entrance criteria.
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- But the fundamental issue is the lack of trust based on past years' experiences.
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- As is often the case, institutions favour students, take money and grant admission based on criteria other than merit.
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- Additionally, innovative cheating methods are evidently adopted across states.
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- **Institutions** - IITs, AIIMS and some medical colleges had taken entrance examination result as one of the inputs for final selection.
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- The number of these kinds of trusted institutions could be expanded.
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- The list of designated institutions of eminence (now six) could be increased.
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- There are hundreds of other medical and engineering colleges that charge humongous amounts.
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- There has to be at least three firmly defined criteria, including
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i. the 10th and 12th board results
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ii. the entrance test score
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iii. a third criteria to assess and make a final selection instead of basing it all on the JEE or NEET
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- **Computer-based** - A computer-based test should not turn into a barrier for rural students.
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- Good planning and sufficient fund allocation should allay the concerns with online testing.
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- **Coaching** - The coaching institutes form a sector worth about Rs. 24,000 crore a year.
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- Regulation of coaching institutes is essential to ensure that the changes do not result in further exploitation of students.
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- **Way forward** - The entrance examinations level reforms would be meaningful only with a revamped school education system.
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- Eventually, measures at improving the learning outcomes should be taken.
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Source: The Hindu, Business Standard

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