



Stronger Law, Safer Exams: India Tightens the Noose on Paper Leaks

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Tougher Prison Sentences, Special Task Forces, Fast-Track Courts

The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026 sharply raises jail terms and fines for exam fraud, adds Special Task Forces for investigation, mandates Special Fast Track Courts for speedy trials, and creates a time-bound appeal process, strengthening the 2024 Act to protect the students.

Every year in the country, lakhs of youth sit for government exams hoping for a fair chance at a better future. When a question paper leaks or a racket manipulates results, it is not just a rule that is broken. It is the hard work and trust of an honest student that is broken.

To protect that trust, Parliament passed the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, India's first dedicated law against exam cheating, paper leaks and organised exam fraud. Now, the Government has introduced the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026 in the Lok Sabha, to make this law even stronger. The Bill increases punishments, speeds up investigation and trial, and gives victims a clear path to justice.

Why This Amendment Was Needed

The 2024 Act gave India a strong foundation. But recent years have still seen cases of question paper leaks and exam malpractice, which hurt the fairness and credibility of the public examination system. The 2026 Bill responds to this directly. It sharpens the punishments so they act as a real deterrent, and it builds a faster, time-bound system of investigation and trial, so that guilty persons are punished quickly and students get closure sooner.

Tougher Punishment for Offenders

The clearest change in the Bill is punishment. Sentences and fines for exam fraud have been raised sharply across the board, for individuals, service providers, and those who run organised rackets.

Provision	Earlier Position (2024 Act)	What Changes Now (2026 Bill)

Individual offenders (Section 10)	Jail term of 3 to 5 years, with a fine of up to ₹10 lakh.	Jail term of 5 to 10 years, with a fine of up to ₹50 lakh.
Service providers (Section 10)	Fine of up to ₹1 crore, and a 4-year ban from conducting any public examination.	Fine of up to ₹5 crore, and an 8-year ban from conducting any public examination.
Directors and senior management held responsible (Section 10)	Jail term of 3 to 10 years, with a fine of ₹1 crore.	Jail term of 5 to 10 years, with a fine of ₹5 crore.
Organised crime and exam-fraud syndicate (Section 11)	Jail term of 5 to 10 years, with a fine of at least ₹1 crore.	Jail term of 7 to 10 years, with a fine of at least ₹10 crore.

Faster, More Focused Investigation

Under the 2024 Act, cases were investigated by a police officer of at least Deputy Superintendent rank, and the Central Government could also hand a case to a Central Investigating Agency. The 2026 Bill adds one more option: the Central Government can now set up a dedicated Special Task Force to investigate exam fraud cases. Once a Special Task Force is set up for a case, it alone will investigate that case, so responsibility stays clear and focused.

The Bill also puts a clock on investigation for the first time. Whoever is investigating, whether a police officer, a Central Investigating Agency, or a Special Task Force, must finish the investigation within two months. The two-month clock starts from the day the police officially record the case, or from the day the case is referred to a Central Investigating Agency, or from the day a Special Task Force is notified, whichever applies.

New Special Fast Track Courts

Designating a Court of Session, to be a Special Fast Track Court is one of the biggest additions in the Bill. Every State and Union Territory will now have to designate a Court of Session as a Special Fast Track Court, in consultation with the Chief Justice of the concerned High Court, to try exam fraud cases.

- These courts must hear cases day-to-day, without unnecessary breaks.
- A trial must be completed within 3 months of the chargesheet being filed.
- Cases already pending in other courts on the date this amendment comes into force will be transferred to these new Special Fast Track Courts, and must be completed within 3 months of transfer.
- Every State and Union Territory will also appoint Special Public Prosecutors dedicated to arguing these cases.
- If an accused also faces other connected charges under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita or any other law, the Special Fast Track Court will try those charges together in the same trial, instead of sending the case to multiple courts.

Together, this means an exam fraud case will no longer languish for years. It moves through a dedicated, deadline-bound system from investigation to trial.

A Clear Right to Appeal

The Bill also lays down, for the first time, how an appeal against a Special Fast Track Court's decision works.

- An appeal against any judgment, sentence or order (other than routine interim orders) will go to the High Court.
 - It will be heard by a bench of two judges, and the High Court must try to dispose of the appeal within 3 months of it being admitted.
 - Even an order granting or refusing bail can be appealed directly to the High Court.
 - An appeal must normally be filed within 30 days. The High Court may allow a delay for good reason, but no appeal can be filed after 90 days.
- Apart from this High Court route, no other appeal or revision against a Special Fast Track Court's order can be filed in any other court, keeping the process quick and final.

This gives both the accused and the prosecution a fair, but time-bound, path to a higher court, so justice is not delayed indefinitely at any stage

What This Means for Students

Put together, these changes send one message: exam fraud will now cost offenders far more, and it will be caught, tried and punished far faster. A student preparing honestly for a government exam can have greater confidence that paper leaks and cheating rackets will be dealt with severely, and that justice, when needed, will not take years to arrive.

The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026 builds on the foundation of the 2024 Act to make India's public examination system more transparent, more secure, and more trustworthy for the youth, who depend on it for their future.

References:

- The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 - https://upload.indiacode.nic.in/view-caspdf?type=act&id=AC_CEN_26_36_00009_A2024-01_1719556801892
- The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026- <https://sansad.in/getFile/BillsTexts/LSBillTexts/Asintroduced/AS%20INTRO7272026121928PM.pdf?source=legislation>

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