

CUET takers face exam centre test

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New Delhi: Many students had to walk up the stairs to the seventh floor, suffocating in Noida's 45-degree heat and polluted air, to take one of the most crucial exams of their lives. The lifts were not working at the exam centre.

Hundreds of others, at another exam centre, took their three-hour tests in windowless rooms in the scorching Delhi summer with the ACs switched off.

The ordeals of candidates taking the Common University Entrance Test (Undergraduate) or CUET-UG have again triggered charges of mismanagement and callousness against the National Testing Agency, the country's premier exam-conducting body, weeks after a question leak scuttled this year's NEET-UG.

"My daughter had to climb to the seventh floor; all the students were asked to walk up to their exam halls on different floors," a parent told **The Telegraph**, referring to the test centre at the seven-storey iON Digital Zone, Sector 62, Noida.

"This isn't what students deserve at exam centres. A lift is a basic facility. When that's denied, it means the NTA doesn't care about the students or their well-being."

This happened when the examinee took her first paper on May 12. For her second paper, on a different date that the parent declined to give lest the information lead to her identification, she was allotted a first-floor hall. But many others had to climb to higher floors.

Many candidates said they felt dizzy after climbing the stairs, and lost the concentration and focus required to write the test, several parents said.

Another examinee, who appeared on May 21 at the iON Digital Zone, Mathura Road, Delhi, said it was stifling hot inside the exam halls because the ACs were off. The fans were running slow and there were no coolers.

"The building with its glass walls looks great from outside. But inside, the atmosphere is suffocating. It's terribly hot," a parent said.

"There are no windows and no ventilation. How can a student suffering in an airless room for three hours write

their test properly?" The CUET-UG, an entrance test for general-stream undergraduate courses at central universities that nearly 200 other universities too have adopted, began on May 11 and ends on May 31.

Every day, two batches of examinees take the test at a particular centre — the first batch from 9am to noon and the second from 3pm to 6pm. Each student has to appear in two papers and must therefore turn up on two days.

The NTA charges a fee of ₹1,000 from general students, ₹900 from OBC students and ₹800 from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe candidates. It outsources the arrangement of the test centres to private agencies, paying them around ₹300 per student.

Some parents alleged that the test centres refuse to turn on their ACs because they think they are not paid enough. The examinees have to report at the centres nearly two hours in advance, and stand in queue for checking and frisking.

When students are concerned more with the exam centre than the exam, it mere-

ly underscores the NTA's inefficiency, said Rajeev Kumar, a retired faculty member from IIT Kharagpur. "The NTA says it monitors the exam

centres through AI-enabled CCTV cameras from its control room. If so, how are candidates asked to walk up to the seventh floor?" he said.

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