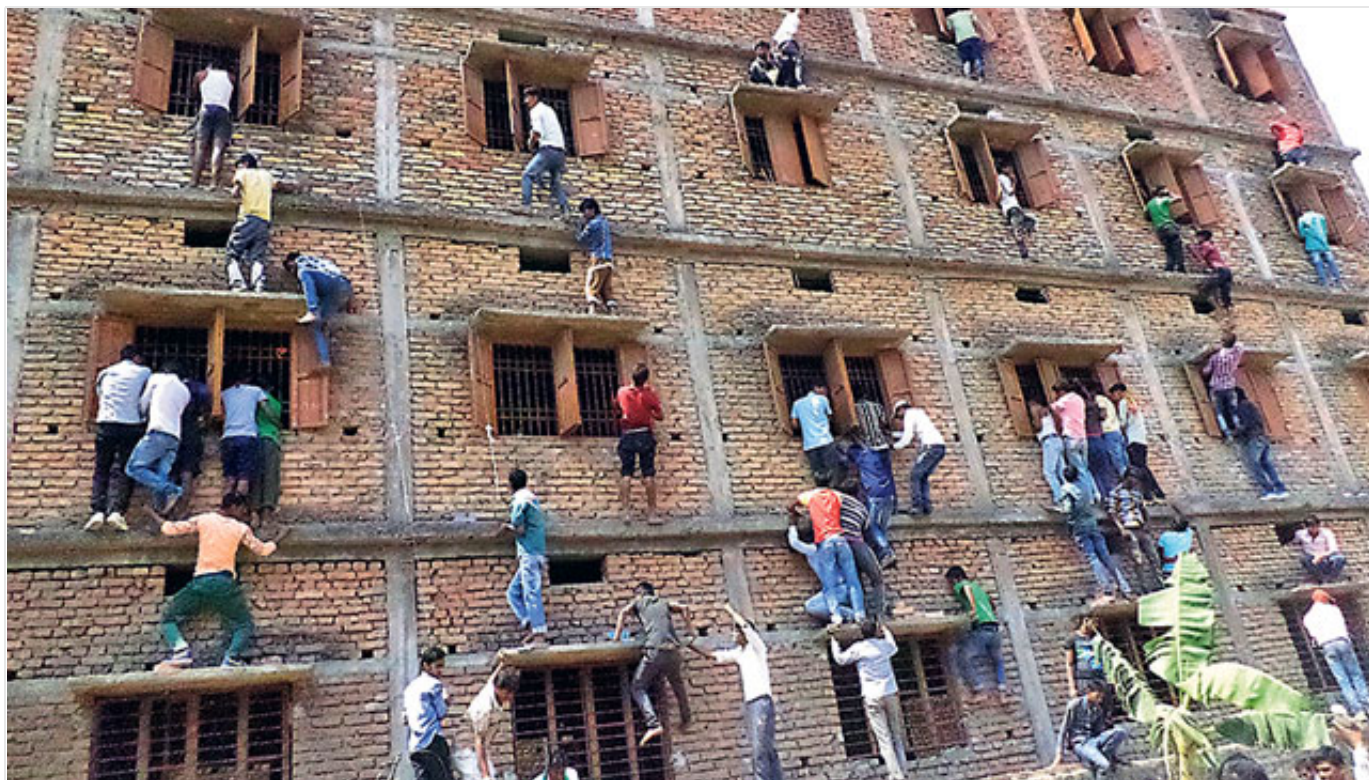


Bluetooth, smartphones, parental guidance: How Bihar students cheat in exams



Students in Bihar can really be innovative when it comes to appearing in examinations - medical, engineering or university-level. They go hi-tech in writing their answers by using the help of bluetooth and smartphones.

But in the state board examinations it is a completely different scenario. Given the seating concerns, the Bihar Secondary Examination Board has just allowed the drift, even closing its eyes to open cheating, and thus helping them.

Around 1.43 million students are appearing for the Class 10 state board examinations this year at 1,217 centres, many of which are allotted a large number of students without commensurate infrastructure to accommodate them.

At least 500 students were caught and expelled in just two days in the ongoing state matriculation exams. The board's special examination cell also said seven parents were arrested in the past two days, in addition to the 515 students expelled for cheating.

While students try every strategy to cheat, parents too stop at nothing and do all that it takes to get their children through. Some even have employed impersonators to take the exam on behalf of their children.

"My son cannot even write but I wanted him to complete at least matriculation," said a parent sheepishly, after 5 proxy examinees were arrested from RB Jalan College centre on the very first day of the exams.

All the five belong to Madhubani district and were caught from different rooms by the invigilators for their faces did not match the photographs on the admit cards. This is only a reflection of the how students take board exams.

State education minister PK Shahi put up his hands and admitted on Thursday that cheating-free examinations were not possible in the state, minus the cooperation of students' parents.

"It is impossible to hold completely fair examination without the cooperation of the parents. There are over 1.4 million examinees and with each of them there are usually three-four people. Managing six to seven million people is not a cup of tea for any administration. It requires parental and societal support as well," said Shahi.

He appealed to parents to not indulge in such practices but also said reports of cheating in exams were common in all parts of the country, not just Bihar.

In Vaishali, Saharsa, Purnea, Darbhanga, Arwal and elsewhere, examination centres presented a sight that could put even the best of athletes to shame.

Scores climbed on to the second or third floor of the building to pass on chits of papers with answers written on them through windows. While some used bamboo poles, others employed tiny tots to send in the answers. Lungi, dhoti and pyjama clad youths clambered up the top floors of the examination centres on drain pipes. Age was no bar, either.

"These people should be in the police or fire brigade. Look, how easily they climb without much assistance and how innovative they get using ropes to carry chits to the desired rooms," a lathi-wielding cop remarked.



A man tries to send an answer chit to a candidate inside an examination hall with the help of a bamboo stick. (HT Photo)

In one school, bamboo stairs ran up to every window for easy access.

The camaraderie among parents was also worth watching. One chit exchanged several hands, with parents sharing answers and concerns without any inhibition.

At LND College in Motihari, the seating arrangement was congested as the number of examinees was much higher than what the space could accommodate. But then such things are not uncommon in Bihar.

Some students in Motihari's district school complained that even teachers were extending help to a select few.

In Bhagalpur, the scenario was no different, with cramped seating arrangement making it all too obvious.

A centre superintendent admitted that they had no alternative but to somehow conduct the exam, as the number of benches and desks are inadequate compared to the number of students.

Use of unfair means in examinations is no more unfair, claimed a student in Purnia.

"What is wrong in using unfair means, I see nothing new in it. What will the students do, after all," said a confident Sanoj Kumar Singh at Saharsa Polytechnic centre.

Ram Sundar Mandal, a parent at Saharsa centre, had a counter poser.

"Why does the government not ensure better and quality teaching in schools? First deserve fair exams, then desire," he said.

He was at the centre to help his grandson.

At some centres, students defended the goings on.

"Here it is not as open as you find elsewhere. But expecting totally fair exams when education has totally collapsed is sheer wishful thinking. Look at who's teaching and how," remarked Raja, who is appearing from RNJ Rungta High School in Jalalgarh.

There were reports of large-scale use of unfair means from Katihar, Kishanganj, Araria, Madhepura and Supaul as well.

Experts say that the problem lay with the poor quality of teaching and the pattern of examination.

"It appears that the administration is not taking the examination seriously and hence use of unfair means is no longer an issue. Equally responsible are the teachers who have failed in instilling values in students," said Bindeshwari Mandal, a retired high school science teacher in Purnia.

(With inputs from Avinash Kumar in Patna, Aditya Narayan Jha in Purnia, Bishnu K Jha in Darbhanga and Sagar Suraj in Motihari)