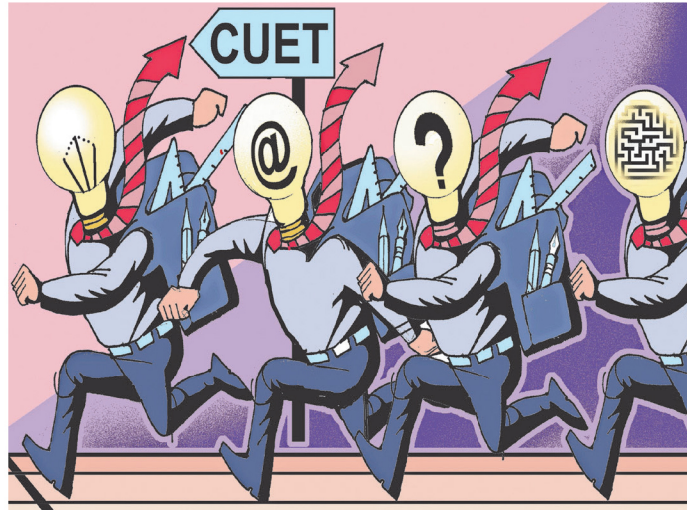


# Not-so-CUET: For Class 12 students, it's a never-ending exam season

Himanshi.Dhawan@timesgroup.com

Amit Bhardwaj worries that he has not marked the answers for the multiple choice questions correctly, Rachel\* feels she is going to let her parents down as her performance sinks deeper with every exam and Disha A's dream of becoming a doctor seems to be more distant every day. These class 12 CBSE students are the guinea pig batch whirling in the merry-go-round of internal assessments and examinations that will last more than eight months.

It started with the split in board exams — the first set of pre-board exams took place in November last year, followed by the



dle, competitive exams for IITs (JEE-Mains) have also been scheduled. Worried students are demanding that it be rescheduled so that it doesn't affect their performance. To top it all, last week authorities announced an entrance exam for central universities called the Central Universities Common Entrance Test (CUET) declaring that Class 12 marks will have no weightage in college admissions.

Class 12 students who have spent the better part of the last two years rolling out of bed for class with cameras switched off are now suddenly swamped with offline exams. To make it worse, some have lost the skill to write quickly

and lucidly, and are having trouble concentrating on studies.

Disha A from Serampore, a Kolkata suburb, had her heart set on becoming a doctor. But these days as she appears for her pre-boards there is panic in her every move. "Our school has not even finished the syllabus and we are expected to give exams. Teachers sometimes just take attendance and leave class. I have been finishing the course with the help of YouTube videos," she says.

Varanasi's Amit Bhardwaj says he has lost confidence after his last exam. A Class 10 topper who had always scored well, Bhardwaj was upset when he got his first term marks this week. He

had barely passed in all the subjects. "It has just shattered my confidence. I feel I will lose this whole year," he says. Bhardwaj has enrolled for coaching classes to cope with the academic stress and has been hitting the books 10 hours a day.

Loss of confidence, panic and anxiety are familiar symptoms related to exam stress and academic pressure. "But," says clinical psychologist Rupa Chaubal, "what makes this year different is that students have been thrown from the numb cocoon of online classes to the very real world of offline school and there are many who have difficulties coping." Multiple exams and constant assessments have not helped this transition.

Psychologist Namrata Khetan says online education meant less accountability. "For almost two years, there was passive participation by most of the students. Now because of the special set of circumstances, this batch has ended up facing several offline assessments. Managing this transition is proving hard for many," she adds.

Gurgaon Parents Association founder Pradeep Rawat says that students call him in a panic. "They sound desperate. Some have tried to harm themselves. Students are going through a very hard time and to throw them into one exam after the other is unfair," he says, suggesting that students be judged on internal assessments rather

than board exams and be given a choice on which term (I or II) they will be marked on. He also suggested deferring CUET by a year to allow students to prepare adequately for the exam. Already coaching institutes have begun courses aimed at cracking the computer-based test. As Shikha Sinha, a Class 12 parent says, "The authorities might say this will relieve the pressure on students but how introducing one more exam in this already fraught year does that is beyond me."

Chaubal says some students are blanking out and fainting. In Gujarat last week, two students died while writing the board exam with one suffering a suspected cardiac arrest. Anxious parents have demanded that exam centres keep a doctor and ambulance on alert.

Rachel\*, a student from Kerala's Malapuram, is someone who is standing on the edge of the precipice. Describing herself as an above average student, she stopped playing or interacting with her friends and mostly stayed indoors over the past two years. She has put on weight and feels conscious of how she looks. "I have trouble concentrating. Sometimes I just stare at the walls in my room," she says. Parents' expectations and comparisons with her older sister (who was a good performer in school) have led to feelings of shame and depression. Though she had plans for doing a business degree, just the thought of appearing for a series of exams is daunting. "People say board marks don't matter but it is hard to believe them when you are the one who has to face them," she says.

*Some names changed on request (If you need to talk, call crisis helpline at Aasra 9820466726)*

**The authorities say CUET will relieve pressure on students but how introducing one more exam in this already fraught year does that is beyond me**

—SHIKHA SINHA | Parent

boards in December. In the second term, students studied for barely two months before pre-boards began in March this year and will continue till April when the boards begin. Board exams for class 12 go on till June. In the mid-