

IIMs mooted scrapping computerised CAT

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The Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) are understood to have contemplated scrapping of the computer-based Common Admission Test (CAT) before deciding to wait for a few more days before taking such a call. At least three IIM professors that Business Standard spoke to, confirmed that a discussion had taken place regarding doing away with the computer-based test and reverting to the paper-pencil model for this year.

Ever since CAT began on a disastrous note on November 28, nearly 8,000 students were not able to take the test in the first three days due to technical glitches, which the IIMs blamed on a virus. After the unsatisfactory show, the HRD ministry had demanded a report on the failure, which was submitted by Convenor of CAT 2009, Satish Deodhar.

"Till yesterday, we were concerned over this issue and with the ministry of HRD also intervening, we wondered on a way forward. But we decided that if things go smooth in the next few days, we would go ahead with the computer-based testing," said a professor from IIM Calcutta. "The CAT advisory group discusses the daily development with Prometric and NIIT and is keeping us updated on the issue. Today, of 361 labs only five labs were shut. We are hoping things will get better," added another professor.

The IIMs have maintained a united front publicly. When asked whether IIMs were mulling scrapping of computer-based CAT altogether, director of IIM Kozhikode Debashis Chatterjee said, "Mulling is different and taking a call is different. Nevertheless, I have not heard any such deliberations. As far as IIM Kozhikode is concerned, we would want the test to get over first. For IIMs, candidates' welfare comes first and we would not want to sacrifice on that."

Similarly, Satish Deodhar, said, "I have been in touch with various IIM directors and I have got no such instructions to scrap the computer-based test so far. Hence, I am continuing with it."

However, the IIMs realise that they would have to pull up

Students happy on Day 5

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Compared to the chaos that marred the first four days of the Common Admission Test (CAT) this year, students across the country today appeared pleased that despite some delays and small errors, the exams were not rescheduled at most centres across the country.

"We had planned to shut down two labs but ultimately we shut down five more labs during the day," said Satish Deodhar, the convenor of CAT 2009. But overall, students found the day much smoother compared to the earlier ones.

"CAT went off quite smoothly today. This seems to be the first day with no disruption," according to Gautam Puri, vice chairman, Career Launcher.

However, the usual glitches of not able to log-in and faulty biometric machines were still witnessed at some centres. At Bangalore's Garden City College, the exam started in some labs after nearly a two-hour delay. Delays were also witnessed in some other centres.

Ajay Arora, Director of TIME in Bangalore said that students are now more worried about the test process rather than the test itself. "Students' expectations for CAT have dropped so much that they call their exam a success if they are able to submit the exam despite all sorts of technical problems." He cited the example of a student who had scheduled her exam in the morning session so that she could attend her university exam later. Due to the delay, the student had to leave CAT mid-way.

The IIMs had earlier admitted that 7,000-8,000 students were unable to take the tests in the first three days. CAT is scheduled between November 28 and December 7 2009 in 32 cities in the country.

their socks in the next few days if they intend to continue with the test. The IIMs would be concerned about the public outrage over the way the tests were conducted. Students have been vocal in their demand to the IIMs about scrapping the exam and conducting a fresh one.

"The computer-based CAT has led to so much confusion among students. It would not be right to use this score for a seat at an IIM. We wish they cancel the exam," said a student in Bangalore. The consistent delays in conducting the exam, difficulty in recording biometric details and problems in logging into the system have been a bone of contention for the student community.

Director of TIME coaching institute, P Viswanath has written an open letter to the IIMs urging them to revert to the paper and pencil test for the benefit of students. "We believe that the computerised CAT should be cancelled for this year - and a paper and pencil test be conducted in its place. This will do justice to all people who

have suffered because of the problems faced by them with the computerised CAT. After a series of more thorough dry runs, computerised CAT can be re-introduced next year after solving various problems that are currently plaguing the computerised CAT."

On the backdrop of the ire against them, the IIMs, Prometric and NIIT, the companies which were contracted to conduct the test had held a joint press conference trying to assuage student fears. The IIMs have been encouraged by the improvement in the way test has been conducted in the last two days. However the protests against the exam continue. Those who attempted the test in chaotic conditions say they deserve better.

CAT is scheduled between November 28 and December 7 in 32 cities in the country. Nearly 241,000 applicants have registered for the exam. CAT is mandatory for students who wish to study at the seven IIMs and over 150 other B-schools in India.