Mock trials would have saved CAT online

Anjali Prayag
Bangalore, Dec. 4

Sandeep P., a graduate from Bangalore who took the Common Admission Test on November 29, wishes his system had crashed.

"There is an advantage for people whose systems crashed," he says, "They already have a glimpse of the paper pattern and can get a (better) second shot at the test. And then there are people whose system crashed for 15 minutes and got that much more time to work on their questions."

But Prof Himanshu Rai, Chairman-Admissions, IIM-Lucknow, does not agree with Sandeep. "It's only one or two questions that a student would get extra time for. This is the utmost advantage that a student would have."

He says that students taking the test on Day 2 and Day 3 would anyway have some idea of what the test would be like, although students have been advised not to discuss the paper pattern.

Despite Prof Rai's reasoning, Mr Ajay

Arora, Director of TIME, Bangalore, an institute that trains students for the entrance test, agrees with Sandeep. "This year's test has become a mockery (of the system). With students writing the test under varying conditions, there is no level-playing field."

In his opinion, the examination process for the year should be scrapped and a retest conducted for all the students.

The entrance exam to the country's most prestigious management institutes has been controversy-ridden – a test paper leak in 2003, changed fee structure in 2004, reservation issue in 2006. Now the exam has thrown up another debate on if the CAT would revert to the pen and paper mode.

Prof Rai says the Directors of the IIMs would take a concerted decision on the matter soon.

SETBACK TO ONLINE TESTS

This is a setback for the country as universities and institutes that were preparing to take their exams online are now jittery, says Mr Madan Padaki, Co-founder and CEO, MeritTrac, a skills assessment firm that has conducted online exams for Manipal University and the State Government of Gujarat. "We have conducted half a million online exams in 24 months and they have worked," he says.

"CAT exams could have been managed better if there were sufficient mock trials and tests for the online examination system. Any software should have to undergo a preproduction test to ensure a desirable and reliable output," says Mr Swami Krishnan, CEO, IFIM Business School, Bangalore.

CAT gets a day's extension

Divya Trivedi
Ahmedabad, Dec. 4

The Common Admission Test has been extended by a day and will now end on December 8 to accommodate the rescheduling of those students who were unable to take the test due to technical failures, according to a release by Prometric and the Indian Institutes of Management.

Around 15,000 students have been affected on account of malware and viruses that attacked the system, according to a professor of IIM Ahmedabad. On Thursday, only three labs in Lucknow remained shut affecting 300 students while the labs in other cities functioned with slight glitches. Prometric along with NIIT continue to monitor the labs and by the end of day 6 of CAT 2009, more than 1,12,000 candidates had completed testing, according to the release.

Whenever testing is not possible for students, they are rescheduled with little flexibility in the choice of date and time. Reportedly, several students are facing the logistical challenges of reporting in another city for the rescheduled test just 24 hours in advance.

"We understand and regret the additional stress and inconvenience caused to candidates who have not been able to test on their scheduled day due to technical difficulties," said Mr Ramesh Nava, Vice-President and General Manager, Asia Pacific, Japan & Africa, Prometric. "We are working with the IIMs to add an additional session on Day 11 to accommodate them within the city they were originally scheduled."

Prometric has extended the hours for the CAT Candidate Care (1800 103 9293), added more telephone lines and Candidate Care agents to accommodate the high volume of calls. Effective December 3, the Interactive Voice Response System and phone support will be available everyday from 8 a.m.– 8 p.m, according to the release.