

CAT to get virus attack cover

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

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STUDENTS IN A QUANDARY

involved, it is hard to keep the system foolproof. The 47 centres which reported problems on Day one, were kept shut on Day two so that they could be checked. On Day three 33 were shut, which include some new centres also," said professor Samir Barua, director of IIM-A.

"All efforts are right now diverted to further isolate and quarantine the individual servers, increase virus protection and control accessibility so that the test can be conducted smoothly on the remaining days. These security measures are being taken not only in the centres that have experience problems but all the others that were operating smoothly," added Barua.

Charles Karnan, COO, Prometric the US agency given the contract for CAT 2009 along with NIIT, said, "All the students who have suffered any difficulty in the taking the test will be accommodated, as all the centres were asked to keep a buffer in case of any such problem, right in the beginning. Of the 8000 odd candidates that have faced problem, 62 percent of the candidates have been rescheduled".



Are bugs killing the CAT?

Why Should 2.1 Lakh Students Pay The Price For It?

Seethalakshmi S | TNN

Bangalore: Are the Indian Institutes of Management regretting the decision to outsource the Common Admission Test (CAT)? Three years after they vehemently opposed letting India's toughest entrance test out of their direct control, these premier B-schools now stand in the dock, facing a barrage of questions from IIM aspirants.

- Why were there no dry runs or mock tests held when 2.1 lakh students were expected to take the test?
- Shouldn't it have been a zero-defect exercise?
- Will the HRD ministry blacklist Prometric for these goof-ups?
- Why was infrastructure not in place?
- Why should students be put through this?

"The IIMs have handed over the test to a US-based company which has created all this confusion. If an Indian company had done this in the US, would they have spared us?" asked an angry stu-

dent who could not even log on to write the test. He'd put in eight months of intense preparation for this day.

Students aren't the only ones asking these questions. Educationists and even those within the IIMs are seeking answers on the very need for a computer-based test. In fact, when the proposal to outsource the test came up, all the IIMs said CAT was too precious to be handled by outside agencies and needed a certain level of competency to conduct one of the toughest entrance tests this side of Harvard.

If the purpose was to reach a large number of students, the technology should have been simpler. To say only a small percentage of students was affected is perhaps being highly irresponsible, for it's a matter of life and career for those students.

It's intriguing that the test was not conducted in some of Bangalore's technically better-equipped institutions like IIT-B, IIM-Bangalore or even the IISc. On what basis were the test centres chosen and in what way are these better than these three premier institutes?

If technology is the way forward to make human life better, CAT 2009 is perhaps a good example of the need to fix the bugs first before using it on a large scale.

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Fool-proof to glitch-ridden

- When IIMs conducted CAT, they prepared five versions of the same test paper — A, B, C, D and E
- They differed in the sequence of questions and this was done to reduce malpractice
- No student in a group of five would have the same version
- Pioneered by IIM-Bangalore in the 1970s, it convinced IIM-A and IIM-C to get together and a single admission test

Students can bank on our buffer days: IIMs

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Bangalore: IIM-B director Pankaj Chandra on Monday said IIMs have two days buffer capacity, which can accommodate students who could not take the test on their allotted days.

"I wouldn't call it an extension. We have two days of buffer capacity. So, we can accommodate the students in that, if required," he said.

On the series of technical snags reported in various centres across the country, Chandra said, "We are working on the glitches and a lot of re-configuration of computers is happening. So, things should be up and running much before the 10 days are over."

Asked if the IIMs plan to continue online next year, he said they would. "It will remain online and I see no reason for it to discontinue. While one would prefer that these things are avoided, starting troubles do happen," he said.

Further, the director said that scoring

and reporting should be no problem, as they have been picked up straight off the server.

NO VIRUS, SAYS COACHING CENTRE

TIME, a coaching centre, said the Prometric claim of a virus that was not detected by the anti-virus software at the testing centres, is difficult to accept. Also,

it fails to address the very real issues of undertrained staff and inadequate infrastructure.

TIME further said their institute has been conducting mock tests for its students since July, and in the initial days, faced similar problems. "Our investigations showed that the servers were unable to take the load of so many people taking the test at the same time, and so we hired additional servers. Once this was done, a majority of the problems were sorted out. It is possible that IIMs and Prometric may also be facing similar issues," the release said.

"We believe that several steps could have been taken to avoid some of the

TOI

problems faced. For instance, conducting a dress rehearsal before the day of the actual CAT; if one is using existing, outsourced infrastructure (computers) to conduct one of India's most prestigious exams, formatting the systems (deleting everything from the computer) and loading only the operating system and CAT software on this secure system would have prevented the so-called virus attack; organizing a more comprehensive training programme/ sensitizing the invigilators; having multiple check-in counters would have made life a little more comfortable," it said.



Exam-date clash quashes hopes of these students

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TESTS TOO MANY

Bangalore: Many students now have a major problem. These are final-year engineering students and chose to take CAT in the first week of December because their university exams are scheduled next week. Now, with CAT servers crashing and Prometric, the agency conducting the exam, assuring them of a retest at a later date, many can no longer take it because their engineering exams take precedence.

Bhaskar Rao, a final-year engineering student, chose to take the test at the Garden City College of Science and Management, went pale on Monday, when told his name was not registered. He told TOI he'd initially opted to take the test on December 2. However, as his university exams were too close to this, he advanced it to November 30. He received a confirmation via email the same day. "I received an SMS last Saturday confirming my test date and centre. When I got there, to my utter shock, I learnt my name was not registered for the day. I had to return without taking the test," said Bhaskar who is from Kerala.

He informed the college management about the mix-up, and they contacted the CAT officials. Bhaskar was told someone would get in touch with him in a day or two. "What's the point? My university exams start next week. Even if the test is rescheduled, I can't take it. I had prepared for this test really well. Now,

an entire year is wasted," said Bhaskar.

Amit, another engineering student, also lost all hope of writing CAT this year. He had opted to take it on the first day itself, but technical glitches put paid to that plan. Officials asked him to take the test on Day 2 at another test centre. There too, the systems crashed and he had to return home without taking the test. Finally, he was told that Prometric would contact him on the new test dates. "It does not look like I'll be able to sit for CAT this year because my university exams start next week. I am very frustrated," said Amit.

Lashing out at Prometric, Amit said, "Only 1,000 students take GMAT a year. Here over 2 lakh take the test every year. Prometric has not done its homework. It should have had a dry run and a back-up plan. If things continue this way, I think the IIMs should go back to the pen-and-paper mode," said Amit.

Thankfully, there were some heartening stories too. Vikas N U, a final-year engineering student in Bangalore, said he didn't face any problem at all and there were no interruptions at his centre, the RV College of Engineering. "We had a 15-minute tutorial at the start and this helped. We didn't have any trouble manoeuvring the test site. From all the sections, the best I think, was Verbal," said Vikas.

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