

CAT a no show for some again

Four labs in reopened centre cancel both sessions

Staff Reporter

BANGALORE: Armed with his admit card and voucher bearing his name and directions to the test centre, Ameesh (name changed) reached the freshly reopened Garden City College to find his name missing from the centre's database, on the third day of the Common Admission Test 2009. Officials spent around two hours trying to rectify the error, in vain, and he was finally turned away with no proof of his having been there.

This candidate, however, was just one among scores of students for whom the CAT was a no show at this now infamous test centre in Bangalore. After a two-day hiatus, during which it remained closed to "set things right", the Garden City College Centre reopened, minus four out of the eleven laboratories. Furious students, who had received a confirmatory message as late as Monday

morning, were peeved at having had to travel all the way to the city outskirts before being informed about the malfunction. While two sessions in four labs — accounting for an estimated 250 students — were officially cancelled, implying they will surely receive a second chance, candidates like Ameesh had to leave with no assurance. "I had rescheduled my test due to commitments at office. They must understand that we all have schedules to keep," the candidate said. Just as with previous days, the Prometric officials at the venues refused to offer explanations, both to candidates and the media. Even the IVRS service was unable to help out in this case.

Distractions

At the Vivekananda Degree College centre, where testing had been problematic, the examination started more than an hour late. Students complained that the biometric verification system posed

hurdles, and logins were slow. "It is unfair because every time there is a technical issue there is chaos in the room with officials and volunteers breaking into conversation. For a test like CAT, where it's a race against time, one cannot afford distractions," a student said. Clicking on the review button leading to a complete shutdown, computers hanging for a short period (about 10 minutes) and delayed starts, all marred the exam experience here.

Exam

Huddled outside the R.V. College gate, students who had appeared for the morning session complained that questions were repeated, and there seemed to be a few errors. The difficulty level remained moderate even on day three, and students remarked that the Verbal Ability section too was really simple.

(Names have been changed to protect the identity of students.)

Snags hit 7,000 candidates at CAT

Special Correspondent

CHENNAI: About 7,000 students were unable to write the Common Admission Test (CAT) due to technical snags during the first three days, according to reports from a press conference addressed by Samir Barua, Director of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, on Monday evening. The Centre has asked for a report from the IIMs.

All affected students will have their tests rescheduled, and if necessary, the CAT will be extended for two days, beyond December 7. However, they may not be able to choose a date or slot of their convenience.

The IIMs and Prometric, the American company contracted to conduct the test,

are blaming a computer virus for the technical snag problems. "The major reason appears to be a virus attack. Though all precautions had been taken to ensure that our computer labs are insulated from such attack, even then there is always the possibility of a virus attack," Dr. Barua said. Hardware problems also marred the test at some centres, he added.

This year, the CAT shifted from pen and paper to a computer-based test. "There are always bound to be problems the first time such a huge exam takes place, especially if it concerns technology. But we are working very hard to fix all the problems and accommodate all candidates." Apart from the actual failure to administer the test, students have complained of a number

of problems, from technical issues like screens suddenly going blank, or the computer hanging, there being long delays with the fingerprint machines, to untrained and unresponsive invigilators.

"A virus attack seems improbable," says Jaideep Chowdhary, a spokesman for the CAT training institution, T.I.M.E, echoing the scepticism of many students. "All the computers should have been affected if a virus attacked the server. If it was a virus on individual machines, how were so many different terminals affected," he asked.

Students also point to invigilators who asked them "not to click too many times or not to click the review button" in order to avoid a system crash, according to Sarith Nair of IMS Chennai.

"A dress rehearsal before the actual day would have shown up the flaws in the system straight away," says Mr. Chowdhary, adding reformatting systems, especially when using outsourced infrastructure, could have prevented some of the problems.

At the press conference, Prometric Chief Operating Officer Charlie Kernan said mock drills had been conducted at individual centres, but not on a large scale.

Even those who completed the exam complained that due to system errors and rebooting, some students got more time than others.

"Even a few extra minutes can make a big difference to a CAT candidate," says Apurv Pandit, editor of the CAT discussion forum www.pagal-guy.com, who also attempted

the exam this year.

Dr. Barua said such students could complain on the helpline or to the centre heads, and if their complaints were found genuine, action would be taken. No one seems aware of how or whether students will be compensated for delays, and there are already discussions on possible legal action circulating among training institutes and on the Internet. There is also some resentment about rescheduling. "Some students have university examinations starting next week. Many come from out of town. Working people may find it hard to take leave," says Vinodh Iyer, who heads Career Launcher's Tamil Nadu and Kerala division. December 6 is also the date of the Management Aptitude Test (MAT) examination.