

# 'All affected CAT candidates will get new schedules'

For the last 10 days, Prometric, the company contracted by the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) to conduct the computer-based Common Admission Test, has been in the limelight for the wrong reasons. Technical glitches marred the test this year and public criticism has been directed towards the company. RAMESH NAVA, its vice-president and general manager, Asia-Pacific, Japan & Africa, speaks to **Archana M Prasanna** on what went wrong with CAT 2009. Edited excerpts:

## Q&A

### Ramesh Nava

VP & GM (Asia-Pacific, Japan & Africa), Prometric

#### How did the virus attack happen? Wasn't there an anti-virus mechanism in place?

To facilitate the delivery of the computer-based CAT to candidates, we spent many months evaluating and preparing 361 testing labs at 104 locations across 32 cities in India. To secure 17,000 computer facilities, the existing network of computers within the colleges selected as testing centres were utilised. On each network, anti-virus programs were installed.

Unfortunately, viruses already existent on some of these networks and computers prior to the exam delivery infected the workstations being used for the CAT 2009. Prior to the exams, all labs were tested thoroughly, including the delivery of a specially prepared demo exam that

fully validated the functionality of the testing software and the preparedness of the labs. The demo exam performed well and there was no indication at that time of any computer virus infection and/or system problems.

#### After the first few days of CAT, what was the communication given to you by the IIMs?

Candidates are the first and foremost priority for both IIMs and Prometric. We are working together to ensure all candidates are accommodated within this year's testing period. This involves status reports and daily meetings in which we collectively assess our progress and determine specific areas of focus for the next day.

#### There are reports that certain IIM officials are not happy with the way the test was conducted.

Prometric and NIIT are deeply concerned that some candidates have been disadvantaged and we are working tirelessly to rectify the situation. Many of the



candidates impacted by the computer viruses have already been rescheduled and most of those have already tested successfully. To ensure we satisfy the remaining demand, we have added 13 additional testing labs, representing more than 500 testing workstations.

#### There are also rumours in the IIM camp that CAT may be scrapped this year.

Despite the unfortunate issues caused by the identified network viruses, almost all candidates

are continuing to successfully test without any issues, and the total number of impacted candidates has decreased significantly since day one. This is the first year of a computer-based CAT and improvements are continually being made to the programme. We regret any negative experiences or inconveniences that candidates may have had, but we continue to believe that moving from paper and pencil to computer is an important step forward for the IIMs and India.

#### Reports say some IIM directors were not in favour of a computerised CAT, wanting to give it more time.

We are unaware of any internal discussions the IIM directors may have had and it would be inappropriate for us to comment.

#### Will there be a refund for students who are not able to appear for the rescheduled dates? How many students could take up this option?

Our priority right now is to resolve any remaining technical issues and ensure everyone who wants to take this year's CAT has an opportunity to do so. To that end, all affected candidates will be rescheduled and offered a test in the coming days.

#### Will there be a delay in announcing the result?

The decision to announce the release of final results to candidates on January 22 is with the IIMs.

#### Was the high number of CAT takers a problem in conducting the test?

Delivering computer-based test-

ing to 241,582 candidates within a window of 10 days across 104 testing centres in 32 cities is an ambitious project, but well within the means and experience of Prometric. Having put in place a solution that does not require continuous internet connectivity, the

CAT is not limited in either scale or reach in the way that an internet-based testing program might be.

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What has been Prometric and IIMs' learning from organising the CBT CAT for the first time?

Prometric has computerised hundreds of exams over the past 18 years and each of these benefited from the experience and lessons learned from the tests that came before these. While we are recording issues and taking note of possible changes for next year, it would be inappropriate for us to lose focus on the current task at hand. Prometric and NIIT will be conducting an extensive post-administration review and developing a series of proposed improvements for next year that we will then discuss with the IIMs.