

# IIM recalls students hit by tech divide

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**Joka:** IIM Calcutta has allowed students from tier-III cities and small towns facing connectivity issues to return to the campus and use the internet facility available at hostels to attend online classes.

As part of the plan, 25 per cent of the students from the two-year MBA programme (first and second years put together) have been allowed entry. The same percentage of students from the one-year MBA executive programme have been asked to return.

The first lot of students started arriving on Sunday, said an official of the institute.

Even as classes started in June, many of those from the two-year MBA programme were encountering hassles in attending classes on online platforms because of the digital divide.

"Most of these students are from small towns and *muffasil* areas. They are encountering connectivity issues, because of which they are not being able to attend online classes. Upon arrival they will be quarantined for 10 days before being allowed entry into hostels," said Manish Thakur, dean (new initiatives and external relations) and chairperson of the institute's Covid-19 committee.

The second lot of students will start arriving on July 21.

The Joka institute had in mid-April asked students of its two-year MBA programme and one-year MBA executive programme to vacate hostels because of a rise in the number of Covid-19 cases on the campus.

As many as 70 students had tested positive for Covid between late March and mid-April.

An official of the institute said the hostels had been sanitised.

Complaints that connectivity woes were coming in the way of attending online classes were first raised in June last year, by the institute's students' council.

Hunar Gandhi, then students' council president, had on June 13 last year written to the then director of the B-school, Anju Seth: "Would it be possible to allow some students, who may be facing connectivity issues or other constraints at home, to return to campus and utilise campus infrastructure even when classes are online?"

A decision on the arrival of the remaining students will be taken later.

"Since several Covid cases were reported during the stay of students on the campus in April, we are treading cautiously on recalling students," said an official.

He said they were planning to set up hybrid classes with contributions from the 1992 batch so that students could attend online classes more effectively.

In hybrid classes, lectures are live-streamed for some students, while others attend them in person. The concept has gained popularity on campuses around the globe amid the pandemic.

The students' council of the institute had on February 16 written to then director Seth: "We don't have the required infrastructure in our classrooms to conduct hybrid classes."

The students' senate of IIT Kharagpur has demanded that the students who are facing resource constraints and not being able to attend online classes be called back to the campus at the earliest.