

IITians protest Dow sponsorship of golden jubilee celebration

Hundreds of former and present students, including many faculty members of the Indian Institute of Technology-Bombay (IIT-B), have protested acceptance of sponsorship by an alumni group from US-based Dow Chemicals for a golden jubilee conference in New York July 18-20.

Addressing the media in [Mumbai](#) Monday, Janak Daftari, an IIT-B alumni, said: 'A group of IIT-B alumni, mostly from Silicon Valley, in total disregard to the sentiments and the callous practices being followed by the firm in their (alumni's) origin country, has gone ahead and under the aegis of IIT-Bombay Heritage Fund are organizing a two-day golden jubilee function in New York between July 18-20.'

The [Bhopal](#) gas tragedy, which is often considered as one of the world's biggest industrial disasters, took place December 3, 1984. A Union Carbide subsidiary pesticide plant released 40 tonnes of methyl isocyanate, which killed more than 3,800 people and affected many thousand more. The Dow Chemicals now owns Union Carbide.

Daftari said that over 1,000 students signed a petition last year urging the IITs to debar Dow from on-campus recruitment or sponsoring programs, 'purely because of Dow's mishandling of its subsidiary Union Carbide's environmental and criminal liabilities in Bhopal and its disregard for Indian courts.'

He said the company was forced to call off its recruitment plans in Mumbai, Chennai, Kharagpur and [New Delhi](#) and 'IIT Kanpur and IIT Delhi returned Dow's sponsorship at the last minute, succumbing to pressure from alumni, faculty and students'.

'It is a sheer irony that in 2005, the organisers of Global IIT Conference in the US, cancelled their invitation to the then CEO of Dow, William Stavropoulos. And here the IIT-B Heritage Fund has gone ahead and not just accepted the sponsorship but has even put the firm at the pedestal of gold sponsor,' Daftari said.

Asked whether IIT authorities have given any approval to the contentious event, Daftari said an invitation has been sent to all senior members of the institution.

'Obviously, the golden jubilee celebration is being done privately but then there is a tacit approval from the senior administrators. After all they are seriously contemplating to attend the event even though scores of faculty members have opposed the sponsorship itself,' he said.

In Delhi, Ravi Kuchimanchi, another alumni, said he, like scores of others, was shocked that the organisers of the conference could even think of associating themselves with a company that has caused such an enormous disaster and given birth to innumerable tales of agony.

'In 1984 when the gas leaked in Bhopal, I and other students in IIT-Bombay were shocked and angry. Today I am shocked to see, instead of forcing Dow to fork up money and clean up the Bhopal site, the organisers of the 50th anniversary celebrations have sought its money. As IIT alumni we can do better,' a disappointed Kuchimanchi said in a press statement in the national capital.

(© IANS / India eNews)