

Gay rights activist raises pitch for LGBT-friendly workplaces

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

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SETTING open dialogue for deliberations on issues faced by the LGBT community, gay rights activist Pallav Patankar on Thursday urged corporates to practice “zero discrimination policy” in a bid to retain talent pool, while speaking to students of the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar (IITGN) in the city on Thursday.

Speaking to IITGN faculty and students on “Queer Movement in India: Rights, Struggles and Activism”, Patankar spoke to students of engineering and humanities on how many corporates are now approaching his organization in order to help them frame policies that help effectively check the stigma and discrimination in work places.

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Programmes of the Humsafar Trust — India’s first registered NGO working for the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community — took students through the work done by his organisation and shared his personal experiences.

“One way of generating a talent pool is by practicing policies of zero diversity and inclusion. Zero discrimination ensures that employees don’t face the stigma. Students, who will soon enter the professional sphere, are in the best stage of their lives to get sensitized on this issue. I don’t want that any of these students, who are the best brains

in the country, should lose out professionally due to their prejudice or fear of diversity that exists in workplaces. People must realize that any stigma or discrimination affects the society at large and takes a social toll on the larger population,” he said.

Exuding confidence that the new government at the Centre will do justice to the community, Patankar said, “On August 15, the BJP’s Mumbai city president Ashish Shelar attended one of our “acceptance meets”, in which parents of LGBT members spoke of how they came to terms with the sexuality of their children. Shelar had ex-

tended his support and added that he will speak to PM Narendra Modi on waiving Section 377 and had even tweeted about this event. While RSS leader Ram Madhav was recently reported as saying, ‘While we are not okay with gay men, gay men should not be seen as criminals’, what I want to say is that we don’t want to promote homosexuality, we are just asking for our rights.”

On the sidelines of this meet, Jasbir Kaur, counseling psychologist at IITGN said, “We already have a support group on campus, called ‘Care’ that looks after gender equality. However, we will have to see the pros and cons of having a formal group to support LGBT rights like IIT-Bombay has. Once we have more clarity on that, we can go ahead with it. IITGN practices zero discrimination policy on campus. After today’s talk, more students have come forward to discuss on such issues.”