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'Change behaviour to solve civic problems'

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AHMEDABAD: If you think gender inequality is a problem plaguing only developing countries like India, news from Japan might throw some light on its wide prevalence— Tokyo Medical University had allegedly rigged women candidates' scores.

Gender inequality was one of the four issues tackled by student teams from Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (JAIST) and IIT-Gandhinagar (IIT-Gn).

Other issues were traffic and road safety, recycling & waste management, and mass transport. The three-day workshop on 'Design intervention for behavioural change' sought to find common ground to understand

problems and seek solutions.

Shohei Hieaka, a JAIST faculty member, said that students from both the countries worked on different aspects of the problems and visited spots such as the waste segregation centre, Sabarmati Riverfront, and Ahmedabad police's control room.

Yudai Yumoto, an electronics engineering student from JAIST, said that cultural aspect is involved when one tries to understand waste management. "Dustbins are more commonly encountered in Japan. We found a lot of littering here. Animals were present in a few of the heaps," he said. Kana Hatano, another student, said that plastic waste is a major problem faced by both countries.

For students like Miwa, the experience of traffic behaviour was dramatically different from what they observe back home. “Traffic rules are very stringent and everyone fears breaking traffic laws. We are told that cities like Ahmedabad are now implementing technology for better enforcement,” she said.

Ishita Goyal, a BTech (EC) student from IIT-Gn, said that the course emphasized changing behaviour and attitude to solve problems. “We learnt from a session by two DCPs, both engineers, that there is no lack of technology but what needs to be done is to change the mindset for better enforcement,” she said.

Dr Leslee Lazar, the coordinator for the workshop from IIT-Gn, said that the course was designed to provide a peek into a different culture to the students who would work in a multicultural environment. “They found common ground and also embraced differences to solve cognitive problems,” he said.