

'This is the time to be a scientist'

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PASHAN ROAD: "This is the right time to be a young Indian scientist," said Dr R Mashelkar, Director General of Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), to the first batch of Indian Institute of Scientific Education and Research (USER), Pune, yesterday. He was speaking after inaugurating IISER at the NCL Innovation Park. The institute's own campus will come up on 100-acre land in the NCL campus in the coming years.

Mashelkar described the inauguration as a historic moment, since two premier institutes, one each in Pune and Kolkata, were being inaugurated on the same day. IISER is an initiative by the government, through the Ministry of Human Resource Development, based on the recommendation of Scientific Advisory Council (SAC), and the initiative of scientists late Prof V G Bhide and Dr Govind Swarup. Mashelkar said that this is "almost the second wave of scientific independence in the country," after the country opened up to economic liberalisation in 1991.

The institute came up in a record time of 18 months, with Rs 500 crore allotted for it, and a team of 40 scientists working towards it. The first batch of IISER, Pune, has 45 students.

Earlier, NCL Director Dr S Sivaram, who was a former project director, stressed on the need for "more such scientific investments". Calling the world their syllabus, and imbibing science in life as an aim, he said that IISER will help learn and practice science. "NCL, IISER and the Pune University, will form a golden triangle," he said.

Prof N Kumar, who is on the Board of Governors of USER, went a step



(Left to right) Dr Raghunath Mashelkar, Prof N Kumar and Dr K N Ganesh in one of the labs at IISER

ahead and actually performed an experiment on 'finite time similarity'. He spun a coin around, showing that it started wobbling more before it came to a standstill. "Call it the inaugural experiment," he said, emphasising that science is taught as science is done. "Learn to question and find answers," he urged the students.

Course Director K N Ganesh spoke about the basic aim of IISER, which will not only enable them to study science but also take up research at the undergraduate level itself.

Mashelkar unveils his future plans

ALWAYS known for his radical views, Dr Raghunath Mashelkar sprang a pleasant surprise when he declared that he too wanted to be part of the faculty of IISER. "I want to announce my retirement on December 31 this year, as I will turn 64 in January. After that I want to be associated with this premier institute," said Mashelkar. He also spoke of plans to be associated with NCL and spend his retired life in the city. "Dr Ganesh, I'll be there," he told the IISER Director firmly; saying he would rather stay in our country than settle abroad.

Yesterday was also Mashelkar's marriage anniversary. He remarked, "My wife sitting in the audience must be happy, that this being a historical event, I will never forget this day henceforth."