

'Students need to innovate'

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Over 50 school students attended the interactive session at NCL on Sunday

By: **Sandip Dighe**

In an interaction with school students, sr NASA scientist Goutam Chattopadhyay spoke of looking beyond marks.

In a unique interactive session, 50 school students spent part of their Sunday with NASA senior scientist Goutam Chattopadhyay, at the National Chemical Laboratory's (NCL) Innovation Park in Pashan.

The talk, organised by NCL under their Science Outreach Programme, saw students from Vidya Valley School, Vidyapratishthan, Baramati and other city-based schools in eager attendance.

Chattopadhyay, who was also part of the team that built Curiosity, the first rover that was sent to Mars in 2011, has been associated with Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), NASA since 1999.

The most common question asked was the fundamentals of becoming a rocket scientist. "Mathematics, Science, Art, History and Computer Skills are important, but you also need passion, along with curiosity and an unerring nose for questioning," Chattopadhyay said.

Students were inspired by the talk. Amey Shirke who studies in Class IX at Vidyapratishthan School, Baramati, said, "I learnt so much from today's talk, and would like to explore being a scientist. Also, I didn't have a very clear idea of how Curiosity landed on Mars, but there was a video shown as part of the programme, which helped."

Ninad Gadhe, a teacher who accompanied students to the session, lauded the interaction, saying such events help students develop an interest in science and research. "Our students attend similar programmes every month. Many of them have changed their approach towards science and are thinking seriously about doing research in the future," he said.

Speaking to Mirror, Chattopadhyay outlined the difference between academic systems in the US and India. "In the USA, undergraduate students get to do research, whereas Indian tend to focus on marks. As a result, their minds are not open to innovative ideas which can be used in research. India should encourage science at the school level," he said "We have very good institutes such as the IITs, and highly intelligent students, but the lack of leadership in academics is a problem," he added.

Chattopadhyay also expressed his curiosity about Mangalyaan — India's first spacecraft to Mars. "I am excited about Mangalyaan. Even if the mission isn't 100 per cent successful, it is still a big achievement," he said.