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Evolution must be taught in schools, says former IISER director

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Pune: Evolution must be taught in schools, otherwise biology will not make sense, Jayant Udgaonkar, former director and current professor of biology at IISER Pune said on Friday at a press interaction for Sunil Bhagwat, the institute's new director.

Udgaonkar was responding to a question about the institute's views on NCERT dropping Charles Darwin's 'Theory of Biological Evolution' from its Std X textbook.

"People, especially in the US, question evolution. Many in India do not believe it happened because of misinformation and misinterpretation of data. As a science institute, we have people

working on evolution. It did happen and people must accept it," he added.

Bhagwat said there has to be heavy engagement in research. "We are able to teach science development through research to students because we contribute to it. We want IISER Pune to be the top science institute in the world," he added.

If compared, there will be just 300 researchers in India in biology with facilities while a biology department of one

big US university will have 400 to 500 scientists. Newer subjects like earth science and climate science need a lot more people working on it, Udgaonkar said.

More biologists good at data science are needed for better analytics of data gathered on the Covid-19 virus, he added.

“We have a lot of anecdotal evidence that the infections are far less serious right now but the correlation between how the virus is evolving and how the disease is manifesting itself remains poorly understood. A lot of data is being collected by all institutes working on this. The problem is how to deal with it. This is yet to be addressed properly. We need data scientists to handle and figure out the data. This is happening slowly. By and large, biologists have not been quantitative in nature. They are not mathematical enough to understand how to deal with large amounts of data to understand the statistics. Biologists good at data science have to increase to have better analytics happening,” said Udgaonkar.