



VIDYALANKAR HOSTS VISIONARY TALK: EDUCATING YOUTH FOR NET ZERO FUTURE

Dr. Rajendra Shende inspires students and faculty to lead climate action, emphasizing skill-based learning and sustainable campus transformation for a net-zero world.

MUMBAI, May 19, 2025 – A packed auditorium of students, faculty, and academic leaders at the Vidyalankar campus recently gathered for the seventh edition of the Prof. C. S. Deshpande Memorial Lecture Series. The invited speaker, Dr. Rajendra Shende, former Director at the United Nations Environment Programme, a Coordinating Lead Author of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning IPCC (2007), and currently, Chairman of the Green TERRE Foundation, delivered an inspiring and insightful lecture titled “Transforming Education: Upskilling University Youth for Net Zero.”

Dr. Shende, a distinguished chemical engineer from IIT Bombay, is widely recognized for his outstanding leadership in implementing the Montreal Protocol, an international treaty that successfully spearheaded the global phase-out of ozone-depleting substances across 146 developing countries. After his remarkable tenure with the United Nations, Dr. Shende founded the Green TERRE Foundation, a crucial platform for driving sustainable development initiatives, including impactful action on climate change. Among his many contributions are the **Smart Campus Cloud Network (SCCN)**, a global network involving hundreds of universities, and a highly relevant **Net Zero campaign**, both actively engaging institutions worldwide in the mission of sustainability and climate resilience.

Dr. Shende began his address by paying heartfelt tribute to Prof. C. S. Deshpande, the founder of Vidyalankar Group of Educational Institutes, remembering him as a “professor with passion” who “engineered dreams” by empowering young minds through an education ecosystem rooted in “purpose and transformation.”

Highlighting India's emergence as the world's third-largest economy and the largest conglomerate of a young and dynamic population, Dr. Shende underscored the vital responsibility that accompanies progress, particularly concerning sustainability and respect for nature. He powerfully stated, “Net Zero is not just a climate commitment - it is a social and moral imperative,” urging institutions to critically rethink how they educate and empower their youth. He called for the fundamental transformation of educational institutions into **Net Zero campuses** to confront the escalating climate challenge, which he termed an existential threat. He emphasized the critical need for **hands-on and skill-based learning** over mere theoretical education.

Dr. Shende focused on what he termed the **triple crisis**: air pollution, loss of biodiversity, and climate change, highlighting their severe impacts, such as 8 million annual deaths from air pollution and the disappearance of over 70% of the world's wildlife in 40 years. He called this the new “World War III,” stressing that the crisis is about the survival of life on Earth. He noted India’s pledge for Net Zero by 2070 and the ambitious targets set by leading industries, underscoring that clean energy and sustainability offer more job opportunities than conventional industries.

He stressed the urgent need to **upskill university students** for these new challenges, encouraging Vidyalankar to lead by example in building a Net Zero Campus. He proposed that faculty and students collaborate as in-house consultants to measure, monitor, and reduce emissions, leveraging modern tools like **Artificial Intelligence (AI), blockchain, and the Internet of Things (IoT)**. His SCCN initiative, involving over 500 universities across 14 countries, promotes "learning-by-doing, accelerating by sharing, monitoring by digitalizing, and innovating by co-creation" to transform campuses into sustainability hubs.

Dr. Shende urged the development of **Net Zero action plans** and active student engagement in managing carbon footprints, including Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions. This process, he argued, not only green the campus but also **skills youth in mitigating emissions**, providing crucial human capital for industries. He concluded with a passionate call to immediate action: “Our fingers are already in boiling water. It's time to act - not tomorrow, but today.” He urged concrete steps to decarbonize campuses and skill students in green technologies, emphasizing the urgency of climate resilience and adaptation.

The audience was left not just informed, but inspired and invigorated to transform campuses into hubs of climate action, equipping students with essential knowledge of sustainability and green skills as catalysts for a Net Zero future.

Vidyalankar is a renowned educational group committed to providing quality education and fostering an environment of academic excellence and innovation. With a rich legacy, Vidyalankar strives to empower students with knowledge, skills, and values to excel in a rapidly evolving world.

Green TERRE Foundation is a not-for profit organisation in India. TERRE is a global and local forum for action by youth and communities on the challenges faced by the planet’s ecosystem, particularly climate change, biodiversity, health, and inequality. **Smart Campus Cloud Network (SCCN)** (www.sccnhub.com) is a flagship project of Green TERRE Foundation. SCCN is a Global Network of 500+ Universities and Higher Educational Institutes (HEIs) from 14 countries that localises Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Net Zero.

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If you would like more information about this topic, please call Vidyalankar Dnyanapeeth Trust at 02224161126 or email at Milind@vidyalankar.edu.in