

reasons – that of inverted priorities in the minds of learned teachers as is abundant currently. Those who could not resist the decline probably served silently till they were eventually outnumbered by corrupt and unenlightened lot.

Unfortunately, these criticisms may not be taken seriously because of my affiliation to the nuclear establishment. The reason for indulging in this debate, however, is to point out the curious observation that those who should have been equally or more concerned about

blatant corruptions in their own institutions much earlier than Pokhran-II, the cost of which is unlikely to be significantly less than that projected for future developments in nuclear arms, do not know precisely how insincere their arguments appear once the facts are bared in another equally real perspective where they are the main actors.

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5. Balasubramanian, R., Karandikar, R. L. and Raghunathan, M. S., *Curr. Sci.*, 1999, 76, 1290–1291.
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## Sanctions – A personal experience

Differences between governments enhance, rather than diminish the need for freedom of scientific exchange as underscored by Lerch (*Curr. Sci.*, 1999, 77, 485). In this regard, Lerch raises the issue of an Indian scientist who was not permitted to attend the Centennial meeting of the American Physical Society. My experience suggests that the concerned scientist could not have visited the US *even* if his Director had granted his consent. The US visa authorities would disqualify him as a representative of an Indian government office that enjoys DAE funding.

The US State Department issued a policy directive in the wake of Pokhran II to discourage interaction between the Indian and US scientific community. This directive does not appear to be a public document, thereby converting an otherwise unambiguous process of visa processing into a grey area. At the discretion of consular officials, it can apply to any individual working in any area even if the original intent may have been to cover nuclear weapons and missiles. I had a personal experience of this regime in June 1998 and once again a whole year later. On both occasions, I had filed my Exchange Visitor papers with supporting documents from my US sponsors including US government offices. On the first occasion, I was called for a personal appearance only to be

told that my country exploded the Bomb and that my travel required specific State Department approval. That did make me feel very important, but only momentarily, because the Visa Officer also cancelled my Business Visa, with a suggestion that it would be renewed 'free of charge' as soon as an Exchange Visitor visa could be issued. This is like a Pizza Hut executive being advised that he can visit his Indian franchisee as soon as it can be determined that he can be allowed to work as a Visiting Scientist at BARC.

Lack of a business visa comes in the way of visits to meetings of professional societies. It also comes in the way of transacting business with our North American distributor. Denial of a business visa therefore constitutes a restrictive trade practice, which governments and industry are sensitive about.

Having to deal with our own 'taluk offices' which work like feudal outposts, I have a lot of regard for the way US government offices work. Civil servants are known for their humility and grace (at least within the US). Paper work is kept to a minimum and there is logic in procedural requirements. My 'consular' experience was apparently an aberration. However a repeat experience a couple of months ago (complete with the call for personal appearance and the

sermon cited above) brings back memories of the erstwhile Soviet Union. The US Visa Officer does not put down in writing the true reason for declining your visa. It will have to be 'Insufficient information' – somewhat different from a bland 'nyet', but nevertheless, with the same connotations. Given the tens of thousands of 'one way' US visa seekers, one can understand why the Chennai Consulate General never responds to calls, mail or FAXes. At the same time, one cannot understand why the need for a personal appearance when a decision was apparently already made. As far as sermons go, we already have 50 channels of cable television, many emanating from the US and sounding much more convincing than an official can hope to be. Besides, many middle-class Indian families (including many senior civil servants, academics and swadeshi-oriented politicians) have their children already in the US or working on a one-point agenda to get there. It would follow, that the million-plus Indian community in the US would be a good starting point to influence policy making in this country.

Travel restrictions interrupted a 10-year collaborative effort, which was rewarding to both sides. Progress was hampered on fruitful research that had nothing to do with weaponry. However, personal relationships developed over

years of joint work are unlikely to suffer for lack of a visa. Our interaction continues. After all, people, rather than offices build relations. As for technology, our company like many others, is developing instruments that can be controlled through dial-up networking. The

American Physical Society may hold its next meeting on the Net – with active participation of its Indian invitee who did not make it last time. Scientific Enterprise is invincible. Policy makers and the bureaucracy need to be 'Y2K-compatible' and keep pace with the

people they serve – if they really are concerned about public opinion.

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## 'Millennium' meetings

September to February is the 'high-season' for both national and international scientific conferences, in India and this year it would reach its zenith

for the word 'millennium' is now associated with all meetings. Many of us take part in such meetings a couple of times and on an average deliver a talk of

25–30 min duration. There are many oft-repeated phrases;

Statement made	What the speaker actually meant
At the beginning, I thank the convenor for inviting me....	Did not even pay me the full travel; I had to pay 50% of the travel cost from my grant just for the sake of 'Flying returns'.
Before I forget, I want to mention the names of people who actually did the work....	None of them did anything apart from mixing a few things; it is my idea, my protocol, my money.
In first few slides, I will review the background of the work....	Somehow, I need to spend 15 min on it.
I am sorry for the poor quality of this slide....	Thankfully none here would like to see the originals; I wonder how the data can be improved upon these days by photography (computers).
It is OK if the slide is inverted, I can handle it....	I arranged the slides. Nobody should make out anything.
I apologize for not bringing an important slide in a hurry....	It was intentional.
How many more minutes do I have?....	Why do you not ring the bell?
Data looks very interesting so far....	Only, I think so.
You have to wait till the next meeting to listen to the complete story....	Do call me again..... 'Flying returns'.

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