Jawaharlal Nehru, our first Prime Minister who sent H. J. Bhabha to convince radio astronomers to return to India, build facilities and pursue similar and even better research. The outcome of this step is well-known internationally. After 50 years, the time is ripe to do the exercise once again, for upgrading science in general, and for updating and bringing it closer to developed countries. There are many scientists working abroad and given the opportunity, they would be glad to return home and do their best for the country. One thing which bothers all of them is the Indian bureaucracy. Let us hope that slowly the system will be able to overcome all odds and grow.

With rich experience in Indian and some of the leading universities in USA, I can only say at this point of time that the academic system within the country has to rise much above the existing limitations and pressing situations prevailing within the country. If the government has decided to follow the contractual appointment system, the terms and conditions must be made clear. We should not forget that in the past, we have suffered at the time of execution of well-meaning academic programmes. For example, through a very thoughtful programme, it was decided to promote some of the qualified and deserving university teachers under Merit Promotion Scheme of UGC. What happened in practice is known to all of us and can only be lamented. We have enough talent within the country; it is primarily the question of providing them an encouraging and respectful academic system. The national organizations must rise above academic dwarfism and be guided by academic achievements and scientific contributions of individuals for providing the needed salary and facilities.

1. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2003, **84**, 5–6.

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Flora resource materials repository

We have noticed that the biological materials on which researches are done at various departments and institutions, not only in Kerala but elsewhere in India, are not properly documented and deposited according to requirements in research standardization. Most often, materials are lost and records not kept for future references, which are mandatory in research methodology. In this background, the Environmental Resources Research Centre (ERRC), Thiruvananthapuram proposes to make a beginning in establishing a pollen repository as a start. In establishing such a repository, we will receive and maintain the source materials (herbarium), pollen slides and even live plant specimens which can be quoted in doctoral theses and also in research communications. Together with the above basic materials, collateral documents like negatives, copies of theses/publications, etc. will also be maintained in the name of the person/department. A standardized format is being developed and this communication is only a notification on our proposal. Those interested may contact ERRC.

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NEWS

National Awards for Science Popularization – 2002

The National Awards for Science Popularization for 2002 presented on the National Science Day and announced by the National Council for Science and Technology Communication, Department of Science and Technology, Government of India were given in the following three categories:

National Award for the Best Effort in Science Popularization was awarded to 'Vigyan Parishad Prayag', Allahabad that was set up in 1913 and has an unbroken record of publishing its popular science Hindi magazine *Vigyan* since 1915. The Parishad is presently developing a dictionary of 10,000 definitive terms in biotechnology with support from the Department of Biotechnology. The Award carries a cash prize of Rs 1 lakh. This year an award to an individual was also presented. The honour has been awarded to D. Balasubramanian, Hyderabad for his fortnightly column on popular science in a national English newspaper for the last ten years and has to-date published over 270 articles. His other achievements besides being an outstanding biophysical chemist are radio and television programmes, popular science books and conducting workshops on communicating science for press, radio and television journalists in India

and abroad. This prize carries a cash award of Rs 1 lakh.

National Award for the Best Science and Technology Coverage in the Mass Media was given to Bir Singh who, while being a medical doctor at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi has written more than 14 books, 39 articles on community education and is a leading health columnist while also spreading health awareness in slum areas. The prize carries a cash award of Rs 50,000. The other recipient of the award was H. R. Krishnamurthy, All India Radio, Delhi who has worked in the area of science popularization for the past twenty-five years, including 57 articles in dailies/weeklies of Karnataka and 900 radio programmes.

National Award for Best Effort in Science Popularization amongst Children was presented to the National Bal Bhawan, Delhi.

This year a Special Award of Rs 10,000 for Science Popularization was given to R. Parthasarathy who has had a distinguished career in research and teaching at IIT, Madras and since 1990 has been writing a very popular and highly regarded column in a national English newspaper, profiling the life and achievements of scientists and inventors. These have been also brought out as a book in two volumes, *Paths of Innovators*.

Nirupa Sen

MEETING REPORTS

Indo-French perspectives on the way to go – Science in the 21st century

Meeting the challenges of the 21st century was deliberated on at the seminar on 'Directions of Science in the 21st Century – Indian and French Perspectives' held at the Indian National Science Academy (INSA), New Delhi on 17 February 2003. Goverdhan Mehta, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore while lauding the long tradition of cooperation between France and India and the three decades of cooperation between INSA and the French Academy of Sciences, felt 'sustainability' is the way to go. The Ambassador of France in India, Dominique Girard spoke of the need for 'global reflection and analysis' on the theme of the seminar. In regard to the challenges posed by new technologies and sciences he said, 'the conviction of the French government is that it is essential to favour the exchange of views between scientists of countries which have a deep tradition of thought about nature and society, and which are willing to act for the mutual benefit of all human beings'. India and France are such countries, he added. A century is too long, felt M. G. K. Menon, for making dictions on how science would go. Society has to back science for science to move forward, and we can only talk of the underpinning elements, he added. He pointed out that the number of scientists among the Indian population was miniscule, as too the number of women in science. He cited 'mathematical strength' as one underpinning element of importance in the French educational system saying, 'I wish we could learn from this'. He felt Indian science needed a revitalization of its education system, the necessity for an environment of meritocracy and a need for underpinning science with relevance to society. India, he said, had not done enough in the area of science for sustainable development.

Marie-Lise Chanin, CNRS, France felt that science education should play a role. Society is badly informed and scientists timidly face issues allowing powerful lobbies to exploit dissident voices among scientists. Basic research was essential and there was a need to communicate this in a simple manner. Society had to be educated in probabilities, uncertainties and statistics in order to understand risks, although she stated that mathematics education in France was still not good enough, while referring to the statement of Menon. There was need for a set of people who could maintain a dialogue with science policy makers, as scientists were not good at it themselves. Pr Jean-Marc Deshouillers, University Victor Segalen, Bordeaux said that due attention should be paid to remove both illiteracy and insufficient knowledge of mathematics. He gave a unique example in France, wherein no distinction is made between pure and applied mathematics, as in the Mathematics Department of University of Dujon which, although has distinct groups in both streams of mathematics, gives scientists the flexibility to move easily from one team to another. Jean-François Sabouret described science festivals as a means for 'science to lift the veil of people's illusions'. Alain Aspect, CNRS said that society had the right to determine priorities in science; however the society was not interfering in basic research and, he added that development of technology must be linked to the society.

Sunita Narain, Editor of *Down to Earth*, spoke of 'science needed for daily lives'. She exhorted for a 'National Toilet Mission' for changing designs of flush toilets that do not destroy India's hydrological system. Having recently exposed 'pesticides in bottled water', she said that this was a reflection on the 'total and complete failure of Indian science' and added that *Current Science* would not have carried an article on it reflecting the mindset of Indian scientists. She said that scientists needed to think about the 'political economy of defecation' that involved the water cycle and contamination of groundwater. In