

The NCCS case

The several poorly worded e-mails sent earlier by Sohan Modak and the continuing trend in his response in *Current Science* (10 June 2007), only make me sad and surprised that one can even think (even if it were to be Sohan Modak) that I can have a vested interest in exonerating Kundu and his colleagues. It is preposterous to suggest that I can influence the decision of the other members of the committee, who are leaders in science in their own right. Hema Rangaswami has pointed out how farcical the SSV investigation can be, although it (or Sohan Modak) had no qualms about going to town with that farce. Modak can deliber-

ately twist my statement on control blots or remain silent on the original autoradiograms for each of the alleged duplicates, but the fact remains that no manipulation is detectable. People in judgemental positions by virtue of being able to write in newspapers, *Nature*, *Science* or *Current Science*, can afford to make politically correct statements on either side of the case, because they do not have to find out the truth. But, my committee was charged with that responsibility and we came to the conclusion, 'not guilty'. I stand by that judgement. I wish that the internal committee had been a little more mature in handling

the case, giving adequate time and opportunity to all concerned to defend with adequate scientific proof. I am not surprised that Sohan Modak is jubilant over the consequences. Talking of punishment, it is strange that whistle blowers and the amplifiers can go scot-free after all the misadventure to ruin the careers of people.

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Save Rospuda Valley

Rospuda Valley¹, a wetland system with many rare plant and animal species, is



Credit: Z. Chojeła, www.zdjecialotnicze.com.pl

located in the western part of Augustów Primeval Forest, a large forest complex in north-eastern Poland. This beautiful valley is planned to be destroyed by building an expressway through it, even though the area is protected by Nature 2000 Network for its unique avifauna. In spite of the opposition from the European Commission, scientists, ecologists (including Greenpeace), etc. the government is planning to construct the expressway. Biologists and other scientists should raise their voice to protect this beautiful valley from destruction. Will Nature win?

1. Stigler, S., *Nature* (news@nature.com, 9 March 2007, doi: 10.1038/news070305-16).

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Research paper writing: Skill in effective writing and communication

Sarma¹ has suggested publication of books by experts on the writing of research papers or theses. There is no dearth of excellent books already available in the market and yet the average postgraduate or doctoral student in our universities is unable to write his/her own thesis correctly without help and input from the guide or the advisory committee members. The root cause for this malady lies in the neglect of teaching of languages efficiently in our schools and colleges at the right age. Over the years since independ-

ence, extensive exercises in writing essays on various subjects, writing précis of paragraphs, summary reports, emphasis on learning spellings by heart and perfection in using correct grammar, etc. have all become almost extinct from the school curriculum. The English language in India is practically divided between the simplistic 'chalta hai'-type American and the traditional British English. Innumerable television channels, introduction of computer education loaded with American lexicographers' spellings on the hard

disk, internet, CDs, A/V cassettes and video games made for children, from tiny toddlers to teenagers, have virtually killed the reading habit in children, with the result that a child continues his advance into his primary, middle, high school, university and later into adulthood without acquiring adequate competence in verbal or written expression. It is a tragic fact that not even five per cent of students from our schools, colleges and universities are able to communicate fluently in any one particular language without mix-

ing words from a large number of other languages. This fact was more appalling to observe when, last year, a TV channel televised a live question-answer interview programme with topper from the Indian Civil Service Examination announced by the UPSC. The candidate was not consistently fluent in either English or Hindi. It is high time that the UPSC maintains strict criteria for linguistic fluency before making a final selection for the top civil services of the country. When in school, fifty years ago, I remember our teacher of the English language, while giving regular daily assignments on essay, précis and paragraph writing, often used a quotation – 'Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man and writing an exact man'. The more we read, we equip ourselves with information and knowledge, the more we discuss, we equip ourselves for healthy conversations and the more we write, we evolve ourselves into perfectionists. The ability to write good text in any language is not acquired merely by reading books on the subject, but only

through self-efforts and intensive practice since childhood. Unfortunately, education being a state subject in our country, syllabi for school education are more open to political interference and accommodation rather than in turning out students with good command over languages and a perpetual urge to excel towards perfection.

In the early nineties, when I arrived in the University of Ghent, Belgium on a fellowship from the Commission of the European Communities, the young and dynamic Director of the department, introduced me to three secretaries in the office of the department. The three of them were also the language specialists in Flemish, English and German besides looking after the routine secretarial work. The Director told me in no uncertain words and I quote him in direct speech for our authorities in positions to ponder – 'Moharir, you are free to send any communication for publication from here, but whatever you write, you show that to the Secretary. She will sit with you, go through your

manuscript, edit it and suggest changes for crisp and effective communication. Please also remember, whatever communication you send for publication that carries the name and address of my Department, it should be scientifically correct, technically sound and must not contain even one grammatical or spelling mistake in the manuscript'. The message was loud and clear. No wonder, all the seven papers I communicated from the department were accepted for publication without any revision or corrections being suggested by the reviewers.

1. Venkateswara Sarma, V., *Curr. Sci.*, 2007, **92**, 1029.

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Modernization and global warming

Of late global warming has become a big issue, which rightly needs immediate attention. It requires a review of the progress of man for the last couple of centuries, such as industrialization during the nineteenth century, large-scale urbanization in the West during the earlier half and subsequently in the developing nations in the later part of the twentieth century, and lack of consideration for the ways of living adopted by man for several millennia in the past that lead to global warming.

With developments in medical field there is a phenomenal control over epidemics and diseases, decrease in infant mortality rate, and increase in life expectancy. Similarly, there is progress in fields such as education, food, nutrition and clothing. At the same time there is tremendous growth in population which is disproportionate to the progress. Education, however, is yet to penetrate several sections, particularly women in developing countries, who could play an important role shaping the minds of the young.

Forested area was converted to agricultural land and given to the landless.

Damming of rivers and siphoning of groundwater brought incredible progress in the agricultural field. Fossil fuel and electricity were used copiously to draw out water for tilling. To produce electricity, more fossil fuel was burnt. High-breed varieties were discovered and there was a 'green revolution'. Food was grown in such large proportions that there were no adequate granaries to store the grains, which decayed in several instances. Similarly, there was great 'white revolution'; increase in poultry and other products. Population grew further enormously; people migrated to cities in search of jobs. Quality of education improved. Business in cities spread globally leading to progress. Numerous chemical and other polluting factories were installed. Sky-scrapers were built in large numbers and at the same time slums multiplied. City-lights, air conditioners/heaters and transportation increased enormously. Dangerous weapons of war were invented, such as explosives from day-to-day products (which were handy for terrorists), chemical and biological warfare and nuclear warheads. Tension was created

among developing countries so that weapons could be sold. These form only a fraction of the list of our progress and modernization.

The result of this is pollution, warming of climate, diminution in ozone layer, erratic rainfall, land erosion; depletion in groundwater, fight between the states over river waters and drying up of land due to lack of water; in some cases waterlogging and salt-water incursions have rendered the land unusable for agriculture. The developing countries failed to adopt systematic harvesting of forest and to afforest the wasteland. Mangroves began to deplete rapidly. Forests once cut were never grown again; green patches disappeared forever. Imbalance of nature had set in; wildlife began to disappear due to deforestation and unscrupulous hunting. Soon some animals were considered as 'endangered species'. Disparity in ratio between the predators and the prey persuaded either the predators to enter townships or the prey to frequent agricultural lands. In recent years, apathy towards vultures that are efficient scavengers, has exposed carcass of cattle