

Some like it hot, some don't

This is in response to Bhogle's recent correspondence¹ 'Thankful or thankless?'. The statements and arguments given by Bhogle seem to be tilted in the Director's favour. The author seems to have come across Directors having more humanitarian and friendly attitude, rather than a dictatorial attitude. Nevertheless, the correspondence is hot enough to sprong a debate on the powers and authorities bestowed upon the chiefs of scientific organizations.

The position of Director or Chief of any scientific organization is such that he operates a Government budget of several crores, handles a handsome number of employees which could range from 200 to 2000. Their future lies in the Director's hands through ACRs, promotions, power centring within an institute and many other day-to-day decisions.

There are two types of people, as rightly pointed out by Bhogle; those who are good scientists interested in doing science and serving the nation. Such persons are not eager to take up the so called 'lucrative' posts. The others are attracted towards the power and position bestowed along with the Chair of the coveted post. These are persons who are interested in running the show with great pomp. They develop good oratory power, have the ability to convince political leaders that they are the only persons who are capable of running science in India, are capable of managing committees in their

favour, etc. They work in the system in quite a contrasting way than what Bhogle has mentioned in his write-up. Moreover, Bhogle has referred to an incident in 2002. Things have changed in the last five years. The budget to institutions have increased manifold.

At present the working of chiefs of scientific organizations has become quite different. They are aware of the techniques of running the show efficiently. I would like to comment paragraph-wise on Bhogle's correspondence, about how much reverse attitude has been adopted by many such individual bosses than what their predecessors had adopted.

They are able to have a hold on the administration, purchase, finance sections and scientists of various committees (formed for their own convenience) by offering them minor/major benefits out of public money. And for these favours, forceful bosses can get their egos satisfied in all respects. So there is a good paraphernalia in any institute which supports the Director in all his 'workings'. Even verbal orders are obeyed. Committees are formed to dispose of specific cases of any nature in favour or against, as decided by the Director. All this could be done in just a few hours. I have specific examples to my knowledge where indent of an instrument worth several crores has been raised and advertisement issued to a newspaper on the same day, completing all formalities of PME, purchase, finance,

technical committees, etc. So it all depends upon the methodology adopted by the Director. Such bosses are able to project their 'achievements' in print or electronic media, and at international, national conferences and various meetings. They have learnt to make impressive presentations, thanks to the internet and Google search.

Referring to the paragraph where it is mentioned that the administration throws all the responsibility on the Director by taking his signature at the last step of the proposal, so that this wrath of vigilance and audit falls on the Director, intelligent bosses would cleverly write 'approved as per rules'. Now the ball will be in the administration, purchase or finance officer's court. May be that it is necessary to run the show smoothly and efficiently.

Bhogle is probably referring to the first category of scientists who take up positions, but because of their neutral, honest and humanitarian attitude fail to succeed. The present bosses accept the position with a big 'Thank you'.

1. Bhogle, S., *Curr. Sci.*, 2007, **92**, 1667-1668.

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Tomato crop plant as a weed

Delhi city's sewage released into the Yamuna River is separated and processed into a manure-like material at the Okhla barrage, situated at the border of Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. This material called Okhla khad (manure), rich in carbon and minerals, is used as a substitute for farmyard manure. We have observed consistently over the last six years that tomato plants emerge over heaps of Okhla manure and in pots and field plots applied with Okhla manure, without the sowing of tomato seeds. Apparently Okhla manure contains live seeds of tomato.

Tomato is extensively consumed in Delhi area in both cooked and raw forms. Live tomato seeds could reach the sewage system via kitchen and market waste or as undigested human excreta. To ascertain the latter possibility, two persons were fed with 1 kg ripe tomato each over a period of 12 h. Their faeces over the next 72 h was mixed with sterile soil and tested for production of tomato seedlings. Abundance of tomato seedlings obtained in this experiment suggested that tomato seeds can pass through the human digestive tract. Herbivorous birds and animals are

known to disperse plant seeds via their faecal matter over long distances. Here is a case of plant seeds (tomato seeds) analogously dispersed by humans. This observation raises issues concerning the human gut as a vector of plant seeds.

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