

## Interviews in academics – need for moderation

There is a general feeling that interviews for selections or appraisals in academics and science (with few exceptions) are not well structured, often the candidate feels intimidated and ends up feeling that 'they' are more interested to let me know what they are rather than what I am and what my worth is?

The balanced opinion is that there should be a definite set of norms for interviews (selection/assessment). The process should not be intimidating or brow-beating. The basic purpose is to assess the individual's calibre, potential and suitability for the job one has to do on an essentially long-term basis.

The general feeling is that capable people (read experts) are always polite, make the candidates comfortable and tactfully elicit information in the interview. Others who happen to be in positions of power through routes other than merit are rude and ask questions with the objective of letting the candidate as well

as other committee members know how knowledgeable they are and the extent of authority that they wield. This defeats the very purpose of such interviews. As usual, we have very unusual situations and problems in academia and universities, which do not exist in the developed world.

The solution for such a situation could be in laying down norms of 'dos' and 'don'ts' for the interview process. This process has been standardized and put in place by a few premier institutions which constantly aspire to foster and retain excellence in academics<sup>1,2</sup>. Such information must be circulated to the committee members while sending them the request to be an expert as well as before the interview begins. It is also important that the full CV of the candidates is available for perusal by the experts in advance so as to enable them to cross check information through library and web sources and come prepared for an

objective discussion. We believe these measures would have some moderating effect of these experts.

1. Building excellence – Guide to Recruiting and Retaining an Excellent and Diverse Faculty at Stanford University; [www.stanford.edu/dept/provost/diversity.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/dept/provost/diversity.pdf)
2. University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee College of Letters and Science, Faculty Recruitment Procedures; <http://www4.uwm.edu/lets/personnel/faculty/index.cfm#recommend>

PRITAM DEV SHARMA<sup>1</sup>  
OM P. SHARMA<sup>2,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences,  
Panjab University,  
Chandigarh 160 014, India  
<sup>2</sup>Indian Veterinary Research Institute,  
Regional Station,  
Palampur 176 061, India  
\*e-mail: omsharma53@yahoo.com

## Invest in soil health for food security

The trinity of healthy seeds, healthy soil and sufficient water is indispensable for successful agriculture and prosperity in India. But since attention and investment on these three resources is abysmal, food grain crisis in India is imminent, sooner or later. Using biotechnological breakthroughs, we may succeed in developing genetically modified hybrids having high yield potential in rice or any other crop, but can they produce that yield on impoverished soil with scarcity of water? Today, Indian soils are more hungry and thirsty! Continuous mining of soil nutrients by high yielding crops and imbalanced fertilization since green revolution have created a widespread negative balance ( $\approx 10$  million tonnes/year NPK) of major and essential micronutrients, and this gap is continuing year after year. The invisible soil biota, which is the 'root' of healthy soil for efficient nutrient cycling, is losing its genetic and

functional diversity due to imbalanced fertilization<sup>1</sup>, injudicious use of pesticides, unabated soil pollution and negligible or no replenishment of organic residues<sup>2</sup>. Soil carbon has reached less than a critical level of 0.5% in most of the areas, rendering the soil more fragile, poor in buffering and resilience against biotic or abiotic stresses<sup>2</sup>. The World Bank has warned that India is on the brink of a severe water crisis<sup>3</sup>. According to satellite-based estimates, the groundwater depletion in many parts of north-western India, which contribute to the 'bread basket' of the country, is getting depleted at an alarming rate of  $4.0 \pm 1.0$  cm yr<sup>-1</sup>, equivalent height of water  $17.7 \pm 4.5$  km<sup>3</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup> (ref. 4). Thus, to feed the teeming billions, sustaining increased agricultural production through improved soil health and efficient use of water and fertilizers is most critical to the issue of food and nutritional security in India.

A robust planning with pragmatic approach for investment in agricultural research from seed to soil is the need of the hour.

1. Patra, A. K. *et al.*, *Ecol. Monogr.*, 2005, **75**, 65–80.
2. Rao, D. L. N. and Patra, A. K., *J. Indian Soc. Soil Sci.*, 2009, **57**, 513–530.
3. Briscoe, J., India's water economy: bracing for turbulent future, Report no. 34750-IN, World Bank, 2005, pp. viii–xi.
4. Rodell, M., Velicogna, I. and Famiglietti, J. S., *Nature*, 2009, **460**, 999–1002.

ASHOK K. PATRA

Division of Soil Science and  
Agricltural Chemistry,  
Indian Agricultural Research Institute,  
New Delhi 110 012, India  
e-mail: patraak@gmail.com