Panjab University defends itself in Gupta affair

In a circular released by its vice-chancellor’s office, Panjab University, Chandigarh, has countered allegations of tardiness in mounting an investigation into charges of fraud against Professor V. J. Gupta of the university’s Centre of Advanced Study in Geology. Gupta has been charged with ‘recycling’ the same fossils in different scientific papers, giving vague and misleading information about the location of the reported fossil sites, and polluting the Himalayan palaeontology data base (see Current Science, 59, 13).

Panjab University says in the circular that, unprepared as it was for the ‘suddenness and vehemence’ of the controversy, it wrote to the heads of seven national organizations, informing them of the dispute and conveying Gupta’s offer of co-operation with any enquiry. The organizations were the University Grants Commission, the Indian Council of Medical Research (whose director-general heads an independent society for investigation of scientific fraud), the Indian National Science Academy, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, the Department of Science and Technology and the Geological Survey of India.

The Indian National Science Academy sent two respected geologists to Chandigarh to investigate the matter. The investigation concluded that an expedition under Gupta’s leadership to the fossil localities was appropriate.

The university has announced plans for such an expedition, but says it can take place only in summer. It says that it is ‘interested not in brushing the controversy under the carpet, but in arriving at the truth’.