

present paper is a welcome reminder that the commonly available alum can be effectively used for removal of fluoride from water.

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This is regarding 'Alum treatment process for fluoride reduction in potable water' and the accompanying diagram. I started reading it and just could not comprehend the context of using a 'tape' in the bucket. The diagram also showed this 'tape'. Then I guessed that it might be a tap.

I had thought that the editorial staff of *Current Science* or for that matter, the referees, would have pointed out and rectified the matter.

It would be good if such errors are corrected. I do hope that you would take my 'pointing finger' in its right spirit.

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Editor's note: *We stand admonished.*

Scientists against nuclear weapons

We would like to congratulate G. Rajasekaran for his bold statement against nuclear weapons (*Curr. Sci.*, 1998, 75, 338). Such a statement coming from a distinguished and respected physicist such as Rajasekaran will dispel the widely held notion that most Indian scientists support the recent nuclear tests by India. We would like to extend our support to the sentiments expressed by Rajasekaran, especially: 'It is the moral responsibility of scientists to resist the making and

stockpiling of these inhuman weapons anywhere and also help in the cause of public movement against these weapons.'

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Conservation of chiroptera and termites in Asokan pillar edict

It is well known that Asokan pillar edict no. 5 is one of the earliest records of awareness of conservation. While some of the instructions in this edict bear testimony to the influence of the prevalent religious custom (such as protecting the rhino, a holy animal), two unusual items may attract the attention of present day conservationists in India. These are *jatuka* and *amba-kapilika*.

Jatuka is the equivalent of *ajinapatra* (skin-winged)^{1,2} and therefore refers to bats (micro-chiroptera as well as mega-chiroptera). *Ajinapatra* is as good a terminology as chiroptera or even better. Buehler² wondered why bats should be preserved, but it is possible that people at that time had noticed that bats might check insect population, and the mega-

chiroptera plays a role in pollination of fruit trees and dispersal of seeds.

Amba-kapilika has been translated as queen ant^{1,2}. Protection of queen ants is a remarkable concept, but it seems termite rather than ant was meant. Chakraborty³ gives cogent arguments based on tales of the jataka wherein we note that the food of the bear is the *kapilika* in *vam-mika-thupa* or termite mound. The predilection of the common sloth-bear of India for this food is well known to naturalists. The word *tamba-kapilika* also occurs in the jataka. In dry areas the invasion of termites evident in all logs, dead wood, etc. cluttering the forest floor and slowly crumbling to dust is a striking phenomenon. Could the agency of the termite in helping the soil to

reclaim its share be the reason for its protection?

1. Mookherjee, R. K., *Asoka*, Macmillan, London, 1928, reprinted by Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1989.
2. Buehler, G., *Epigr. Indica*, 1894, vol. II.
3. Chakraborty, M., *Mem. Asiatic Soc. Bengal*, 1905-1907.

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