

degradation in the wetland, some local populations may have become isolated. This factor may considerably reduce the ability of the populations to expand, recover and occupy new areas which may have eventually developed suitable conditions for the species³. Besides, the species is highly vulnerable to hunting, because its meat is considered delicious. Being a Protected Area, fishing and other human activities inside the sanctuary are still a matter of concern. However, the Forest Department has left no stone unturned for the protection of the sanctuary. From the current situation of the wetland it can be inferred that the pleth-

ora of birds inside the sanctuary may no longer remain as such, although the decline may not be seen within 4–5 years in the near future. The Bombay Natural History Society has identified this wetland as nationally important site for birds under the (Important Bird Area) programmes governed by the BirdLife International, UK. Bird species are under pressure due to a variety of human disturbances inside the sanctuary, which may affect their population, bringing about a declining trend in the regeneration of this species in the near future and thus threatening its survival. Hence ecological studies on this species and pro-

tection of their habitat are of immediate concern.

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NEWS

UGC–DAE collaboration

The University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Department of Atomic Energy, Govt. of India (DAE) have had a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) since July 1989 ‘to make available the facilities of the DAE to the students and researchers of the university system and to involve them in the design and fabrication of systems and equipment for the setting up of new research facilities’. The UGC had created an Inter-University Consortium with its headquarters at Indore for utilization of DAE facilities. The interaction between the university system and the DAE institutions – for using research facilities at Dhruva reactor (BARC, Mumbai), variable energy cyclotron (VECC, Kolkata), Indus I synchrotron (CAT, Indore), IGCAR (Kalpakkam) and Institute of Physics (Bhubaneswar) – fostered by the Consortium has been a successful endeavour for more than a decade.

Encouraged by the success achieved so far, both the UGC and the DAE have been keen to enhance the present level of in-

teraction to cover major research programmes of mutual interest. A fresh MOU has been entered into between the UGC and the DAE to achieve this objective. The new MOU, which will be in force for a period of ten years and which may be renewed further, has been signed on 10 December 2003 at New Delhi by Anil Kakodkar, Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission and Secretary, DAE and Arun Nigavekar, Chairman, University Grants Commission.

The following are some of the salient points (excluding administrative and financial aspects) that have emerged:

- (a) The ‘Inter-University Consortium for DAE Facilities’ is renamed ‘UGC-DAE Consortium for Scientific Research’.
- (b) Collaboration between DAE and UGC will be expanded to cover basic research in physical sciences, chemical sciences, life sciences and engineering sciences. It may be noted that the DAE has wide-ranging programmes in the areas

of development of nuclear power, application of radiation technologies to food and agriculture, healthcare, industry and research, and broad-based R&D in nuclear science.

(c) The DAE will continue to make major research facilities, and infrastructural and other facilities necessary to carry on research work, accessible to researchers from universities and institutions of higher learning. Specific proposals would be accepted, subject to usual peer review by appropriate committees of the Consortium. It is expected that proactive collaborations will strengthen the academic–research linkage for mutual benefit.

(d) The DAE and the Consortium will participate in each other’s training, educational, research and developmental programmes, including discussion meetings and refresher/orientation programmes. It is expected that this will enhance free flow of ideas and researchers between the university system and the DAE institutions.

The Aryabhata Award for Dr Vasant Gowariker

The Astronautical Society of India has announced the prestigious Aryabhata Award for the year 2001 to Dr Vasant Gowariker, ISRO, Prof. Satish Dhawan Distinguished Professor, and formerly Scientific Adviser to the Prime Minister for his outstanding lifetime contribution in the promotion of Astronautics in India.

The award is given in recognition of his contributions in innovating new technologies and capabilities leading up to establishment of national systems involving space, building up of space related institution in which he played a leadership role, and helped in important decision making processes in the overall field of

astronautics. Prof. Satish Dhawan, the first Secretary of Department of Space and Dr A. P. J. Abdul Kalam have been among the previous recipients of the Aryabhata Award.

The Aryabhata Award is the highest award given by the Astronautical Society of India. It carries a citation and a cash amount of Rs one lakh.