

Press Release

AU VC's utterances unscientific and against the spirit of inquiry

The Human Rights Forum (**HRF**) condemns the claim by Andhra University Vice-Chancellor G Nageswara Rao at the Indian Science Congress (ISC) held recently at Jalandhar that the Kauravas of *Mahabharata*, the mythological epic, were born out of stem cell research and test tube fertilisation process. He went on to proclaim that Ravana, from another epic *Ramayana*, had aircraft of 24 different types, and Sri Lanka, at that time, had airports!

Such outlandish assertions are completely unsustainable and amount to an advocacy of pseudo-science. These unfounded claims have no basis in science and are clearly incompatible with the scientific method and thinking. In fact, these assertions are detrimental to a scientific outlook and amount to a denigration of science. As has since been rightly pointed out by several scientists, such gibberish can undermine the integrity of the scientific process.

What is even more distressing is that the VC made these remarks at a gathering consisting of many young, impressionable minds. His stark illiteracy, mired as it is, in deadening everyday obscurantism that cites mythology as fact, is damaging to society. Voicing of such mumbo-jumbo is no laughing matter. For a teacher of inorganic chemistry who is VC of a prestigious university to be making these dubious claims is even more alarming.

Mr Rao is in exalted company. We recall Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pronouncement several years ago that the elephant-headed Hindu deity Ganesh was proof of ancient India's mastery over transplantation and plastic surgery. Several speakers at successive ISC meets in the recent past have made equally bizarre claims. The ISC is a gathering of, purportedly, the country's top scientific minds. It is dreadful that a prestigious science meet can be used as a platform for peddling pseudo-scientific rubbish.

The utterances of Mr. Rao are in direct conflict with Article 51 A (h) of the Constitution of India as it mandates that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India to develop scientific temper, humanism and spirit of inquiry and reform. And Mr. Rao is a citizen of India!

HRF calls upon all to protest and resist propagation of such unscientific, irrational and obscurantist ideas and to uphold rational intellectual inquiry and the scientific temper.

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