

Commentary

Take home from Lindau

At the 59th Lindau Nobel Laureate meeting in Germany devoted to chemistry, India expectedly had a strong presence. *Shahzada Ahmad* tells us why this year was a landmark for India at Lindau and how the Lindau alumni are making a difference back home.

The [Lindau Nobel Laureates Meetings](#) are awe-inspiring and truly splendid events which accomplish every objective that their organisers must have in mind. The meetings have been held since 1951 in Lindau on Lake Constance in Germany and bring together Nobel Laureates to meet with young scientists from all over the world. They provide an ideal platform for stimulating discussion in the midst of a breathtaking landscape. Round-table deliberations, brain-storming sessions, luncheons with Nobel Laureates, invigorating debates on both scientific and social issues, boat-trips and musical concerts make the trip a memory to cherish life-long.

Interaction with the Laureates, most of whom have been our textbook heroes, is highly enriching. Informal interaction with them helps students get to know them as people. The credit goes to the Laureates themselves who are at pains to impress upon us that they are ordinary individuals with just an incredible sense of curiosity. In fact, they make us believe that they had come down to Lindau to gain knowledge and inspiration from us!

India at Lindau

India has been participating at the Lindau meet since 2001. In a bilateral agreement with the German Research Foundation DFG, India's department of science and technology sends a group of 20 young researchers and students every year to Lindau. This year at the 59th Lindau meet (June 28 to July 3) dedicated to chemistry, India has assumed partner status and so 43 young scientists were chosen for a rendezvous with the Nobel Laureates.

India's past science and technology minister till April 2009 (and now the HRD minister) Kapil Sibal even seeded the idea of a similar meeting in India. For his contribution to science and technology, Sibal has been chosen a new member of the Honorary Senate of the Foundation Lindau along with José Barroso, President of the EU-Commission.

Says J. Judith Vijaya, a lecturer in the department of chemistry at Loyola College, Chennai and among this year's Lindau attendees from India, "The meeting had exciting sessions on sustainable solutions to nullify the effects of climate change, conversion to renewable energy and developing eco-friendly methods for the production of materials. The link between science, society and sustainability was well discussed."

Vijaya, like most of his peers, is coming back from the meet realising the need for more meaningful and application-based research in future.

When DFG established its fourth international office in India in 2006 (the second in Asia after China) with Gernot Gad as director, the first alumni meet was planned. All Indian Lindau alumni since 2001 were invited to attend parallel scientific workshops in three disciplines (Physics, Chemistry and Physiology or Medicine). The sessions were well received and appreciated by national and international peers who came to chair the sessions. The combination of renowned scientists and chosen young researchers — 'Experience meets Vision' — proved successful for the event. The Alumni also organized an interesting and entertaining evening session 'Down Memory Lane' showing a photograph presentation wherein they relived their experience in Lindau followed by unusual humorous lecture on sciencetoons (science in cartoons).

Work back home

Much has happened since then. Regular alumni meetings at the DFG Delhi office keep past scholars informed about the latest initiatives in research and development and DFG funding opportunities. They provide information on joint events under the Indo-German science cooperation. The alumni also discuss their own career progress and latest trends in their fields of research.

Through these meetings came the motivation to inculcate scientific temperament in school pupils. The Nobel Laureates motivate young researchers to reach schoolchildren. The idea is to move beyond academic considerations and to take a look at comprehensive everyday examples of science. The looming crisis in science is that it is not attracting the best of young talent and those who opt for sciences do not pursue it further.

This initiative to promote science at schools, trying to ignite the minds of our young generation to pursue a career in science, seeks to answer the following questions. How well has the scientific community conveyed the message to the masses that science and technology are engines driving the technology growth? How well do we convey success stories in science and technology to these young minds?

The Indian Lindau alumni hold interactive sessions with children, highlighting the omnipresence of science in our day to day experiences. Science is hidden in our childhood stories and poems. We see the marvels of science every day. Science is at every step of life; it is up to us whether we perceive the scientific phenomenon unfolding in front of our eyes. This is the message that alumni take to the pupils.



Some of the Indian delegates with former S&T minister Kapil Sibal at the 2009 Lindau meeting.

Students are also informed about career avenues in higher studies. Interdisciplinary fields such as artificial intelligence and nanotechnology are discussed and institutes offering courses in these fields are suggested to the pupils. Based on our first hand experience in Lindau these pupils are motivated for a career in fundamental science.

Our school science presentation thus covers a motivational spectrum ranging from everyday scientific observations to touching upon the bright prospects of basic research. In 2007 Professor Wolfgang Schürer, Chairman of the Lindau Nobel Foundation, visited India and was appreciative of the programme undertaken by the Lindau Delhi alumni.

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