

## **MINUTES OF THE NATIONAL MEETING OF AVH ASSOCIATIONS HELD ON APRIL 2, 2010**

A meeting of national representatives of AvH Associations in India was held at 14:30 hrs on April 2, 2010 in the Council Room of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bangalore.

The meeting was attended by: S. S. Hasan (Chair, President AvH Association Bangalore), Amita Chandra (Ambassador Scientist), P. Munshi (Kanpur Humboldt Club), B. Subramanian (President, Humboldt Club Chennai), D. K. Pandey (Secretary, Humboldt Club Jaipur), B. P. Asthana (General Secretary, Humboldt Academy Varanasi), R. R. Bhargava (Vice-President, Humboldt House of Uttaranchal), A. K. Khanna (President, Humboldt Academy of Bombay), V. K. Jindal (Treasurer, Humboldt Academy Chandigarh), L. M. Manocha (President, Humboldt Academy of Gujarat), A. Bhatti (President, Humboldt Vereinigung der JNU), A. R. Choudhuri (AvH Association Bangalore), Phoolan Prasad (AvH Association Bangalore), Manju Bansal (AvH Association Bangalore) and Biman Nath (AvH Association Bangalore).

### **Welcome**

The meeting began with the Chairman, S. S. Hasan warmly welcoming all the members. He gave a brief background of how the idea of such a meeting originated. There was an earlier initiative in 2004 by the Chandigarh chapter in which representatives from Humboldt Clubs of SAARC countries met. However, subsequently no such meetings were held, apart from the present one. It was gratifying to note the excellent response to the present effort, with representation from 10 of the 15 national AvH associations.

### **Introduction of the National Associations**

Various representatives gave a brief background of their respective associations, membership strength and activities. It was noted that Bangalore, Chennai and Mumbai have the largest number of Humboldtians (approximately 90). However, in Bangalore only half of them have joined the AvH Association. This led to a discussion on whether it was desirable to have membership through subscription. Some of the clubs have taken the view that all Humboldtians within the jurisdiction of a particular chapter, are by default members. This would have the advantage of drawing a much larger group into the activities of the local associations. As far as expenses were concerned, these could be generated by creating a corpus fund through contributions from organizations for specific events and from the residue amount left over after holding a Humboldt Kolleg. Delhi has a large number of Humboldtians, but efforts to bring them together under a common association were unsuccessful. Presently, the only chapter in Delhi consists of a small group (about 15) Humboldtians at JNU, working mainly in the humanities.

### **Role of AvH Associations**

A. K. Khanna gave a presentation of the activities of the Humboldt Academy of Bombay (formerly Humboldt Club), which is one of the oldest associations founded in the 1980s. He mentioned that they have so far organized four Kollegs, and opened

two new chapters (Gujarat and Rajasthan) and a Western Regional Humboldt Academy, consisting of Maharashtra, Goa, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. He pointed that AvH has recently instituted a Humboldt Alumni Award (Euros 25,000.) for Innovative Networking, which would enable chapters to undertake major programmes. In addition to the regular activities that most associations pursue that include organizing lectures and meetings, it would be useful to consider taking up new programmes which create a higher level of visibility of Humboldtians.

There was a general discussion on ways and means in which Humboldt associations could play a more effective and meaningful role. As a first step, it was felt that all chapters should have a website that should contain at least the list of Humboldtians with their specialization, affiliation and email address. Once this is achieved, the various associations can provide links to the others chapters and in this way a central database can become available of Humboldtians in the country. A. K. Khanna offered to provide a template for the general structure of a AvH website. This would be the starting point for taking up a number of network activities, including a list of Humboldtian mentors for students and young persons, especially those interested in taking up higher studies in Germany.

B. P. Asthana made a presentation where he highlighted some desirable objectives for AvH associations. Apart from organizing meetings and making young researchers aware about AvH Fellowships, he suggested that associations should enhance scientific co-operation among various institutions as well as among individuals. He stressed that Senior Humboldtians that could play an important role in:

- Identifying from their areas young scientists, who could be prospective AvH Fellows and encouraging them to apply for the AvH Fellowship;
- Helping young scientists in identifying a suitable host in Germany;
- Assisting these scientists in formulating a good research project.

Other points that were raised included:

- An effective programme for public outreach, under the Humboldt banner, would give further visibility to our activities and objectives, especially targeted towards school children;
- Efforts should be made to build up expert groups in a few specialized areas to bring a more focused interaction between Indian and German researchers;
- It would be desirable to document native knowledge and practices; however, it was pointed out that the CSIR has already undertaken this activity in a major way.

### **Humboldt Academy of India?**

There was general agreement that it is premature to consider a central body such as a Humboldt Academy of India. Rather, it would be preferable first to further strengthen the activities of the individual chapters and build greater co-operation among them through informally joining hands with regional AvH associations.

### **AvH Delhi Office: Current activities and future perspectives**

Amita Chandra, Ambassador Scientist, gave a presentation on the activities of the AvH Foundation Delhi office. She highlighted the role of an ambassador scientist that included: (a) advertising programmes of the Foundation, (b) co-ordinating the

activities of AvH, DAAD, DFG and other organizations, (c) providing advice to prospective AvH applicants and newly selected Fellows, as also the AvH foundation about Indian programmes in higher education and research, and (d) building the AvH alumni network. She provided statistics on the distribution of AvH Fellows by institution and discipline, number of alumni and Humboldt Award Winners as well as the grants disbursed for equipment and books. India ranks third in the number of AvH Fellowships granted annually. She also discussed the role of AvH associations and stressed that their activities should also include social interaction with families.

### **Proposal for a Humboldt Kolleg**

S. S. Hasan made a presentation on a proposal for holding a Humboldt Kolleg during Feb. 2-5, 2011 at Bangalore on *Self-organized Criticality: Dynamics of Complex Systems*. He briefly elaborated on the concept of the theme. Spread over four days, the Kolleg would enable advances in disciplinary fields to be dealt with rigorously, and at another, purposively encourage trans-disciplinary treatment of ideas that while originating in a specific context, would prove fruitful in addressing wider analogous issues.

Special efforts would also be made to draw in the meeting, researchers from the fields of physics, chemistry, biology, sociology and economics and areas where structure formations are apparently mediated by the same self-similar processes;

The meeting would have 7 plenary sessions (each of 45 min.) and 20 sessions (30 min.), some of them in parallel on Physical, Biological, Chemical and Socio-economic systems. There would be a special session for a meeting of the various AvH Clubs/Associations of India. More information about the meeting would be posted on the Bangalore website if the Kolleg proposal is accepted. Hasan hoped that representatives of the other chapters would inform their members about the Kolleg. He looked forward to their participation in the meeting.

### **Recommendations**

1. All the AvH association in the country should give high priority for setting up a website that provides a list of former Humboldt Fellows with specialization and contact information as well as links to other chapters in the country;
2. AvH associations should enlarge their membership base by also letting Humboldtians in their region become members;
3. AvH associations that plan Kollegs, should keep other chapters informed about their plans and wherever possible also involve them in their organization;
4. In addition to organizing Kollegs, associations can pool their efforts with other chapters to organize smaller meetings on specialized topics;
5. Membership to AvH associations should be free with subscription that is event based.
6. It would be desirable for the national AvH associations to meet annually to maintain and further enhance co-operation as well plan future activities jointly.