

Comet was first spotted in India

BANGALORE, March 23 (PTI): NEW light on early astronomical observations shows that an important astronomical discovery was made in India in 1689.

Fr. Richaud, who used a telescope for the first time in India, 80 years, after it was invented by Galileo, made important astronomical discoveries using a 12-foot telescope at Pondicherry in South India.

The most important discovery made by the father was that of the double star, Alpha Centauri, in the southern skies.

According to researchers at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) here, Fr. Richaud is also credited to be the first astronomer to observe Halley's Comet in December 1689. He reported his observations in the "Memoirs of the Royal Academy of Sciences of Paris."

The researchers, N. Kameshwara Rao, A. Wagsiwari and Christina Louis, say the observations enabled

Fr. Richaud to discover Alpha Centauri, which later became a favourite object of many astronomers of the Madras observatory since its inception in 1792.

On April 4, 1689, a lunar eclipse occurred exactly at the time indicated by the father and a large number of French and Indians watched it.

Fr. Richaud had determined the latitude of Pondicherry at $11^{\circ} 53'$ which is very close to the present $11^{\circ} 56'$. Similarly he fixed the latitude of San Thome, which he described as a famous city of India in the memoirs, at $13^{\circ} 10'$ very close to the present $13^{\circ} 9'$.

Quoting records available at the archives of the Jesuits at Paris, the researchers say the father was not only interested in practical work but also taught astronomy at a school opened by the Jesuits at San Thome.

The researchers say the saint, who combined scientific culture with his religious beliefs, finally died on April 2 1693, in Pondicherry. This has been established by the evidence provided by the letters written from Pondicherry by his fellow priests. These unpublished letters have been preserved at the archives of the foreign missions, Paris.

However, they say their efforts to locate the father's grave have not been successful since it is believed to have been destroyed during the war with the Dutch. "We are still trying to get more information regarding Fr. Richaud's stay at Pondicherry and San Thome, and hope to get some records of his work in India from these two places."

The IIA director, Prof J.C. Bhattacharya, says after the early astronomical observations made by Fr. Richaud, there was a gap in scientific studies. Systematic observations started against only in 1786, when William Petrie, an officer of the East India Company, set up a private observatory at Madras. Since then astronomers in India have had several achievements to their credit.

Corpn. urged not to hike house tax

By A Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, March 23: A meeting of litterateurs, administrators, politicians and public men today passed a resolution urging the Bangalore city corporation to withdraw its proposal to hike house taxes. The meeting had been organised by the J.P. public affairs institute.

They opined that increasing the house tax would burden the common man further. They pressed for the reintroduction of the octroi system to make up for the deficits caused by withdrawing the proposal to hike the house taxes.

Among the participants were: Mr B. Basavalingappa, former Congress minister, Mr Fazlul Hasan, historian, Dr Thimmaiah, director of the Institute for Social and Economic Change, and Mr B.K.M. Gowda, Bangalore city mayor.