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New instrument tested at Kavalur observatory

VELLORE, May 8.

Design, fabrication, installation and testing of a new instrument, the prime focus photometer, for the 2.34-m Vainu Bappu Telescope (VBT), the biggest in Asia, have been completed at the Vainu Bappu Observatory (VBO) of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) at Kavalur in North Arcot district.

Photometric observations of a faint, rapid variable star 'AM Canum Venaticorum' were obtained during the first series of experiments conducted with the instrument by IIA in collaboration with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). The counts recorded were six times larger than those previously recorded with the one-metre reflector.

Another programme was initiated recently at the VBO, with Dr. R. Rajamohan as the project leader, to discover new objects in the solar system, and also variable stars. A 45-60-cm Schmidt telescope, which was installed a year ago to observe the Halley's Comet, is being used for the programme. The scientists working in the programme have already detected several moving and variable objects through the telescope. The identification of these objects was in progress, and the team is confident of reporting discoveries of new objects in the solar system.

Many astronomers of the IIA are now actively engaged in the study of the 'supernova phenomenon in the large magellanic cloud (LMC) which was recently discovered by observers in the southern hemisphere. Observations of the 'supernova' have begun at the VBO.

The astrophysical community is excited over this discovery since it is the first supernova to explode in LMC, or in any of the satellite systems of our galaxy, in recorded history.
