

**Thought  
for the day**

I have always thought the actions of men  
the best interpreters of their thoughts. -  
John Locke

**OPINION 9****PICTURE THIS**

DAILY NEWS: A man relaxes with a newspaper under the shade of trees in Cubbon Park PIC/VINOD KUMAR T

**The Bureaucrat and the Stargazer****Indira Chowdhury**

is a Bangalore-based historian  
and a consultant archivist.

Write to her at:

indira.chowdhury@gmail.com

On July 2 1949, a comet was recorded on a photographic plate taken at the Oak Ridge Station at the Harvard Observatory. This was a purely accidental discovery but among those who discovered it was an Indian student who was working towards his doctoral degree at Harvard. The ripples of this discovery reached India soon enough, but there were no congratulations offered from the government; the government felt that none was due. The Education Department of the Indian Embassy in Washington DC sharply reprimanded the young man asking him to focus on his research and implying that he should not go about discovering comets! The reprove came in the wake of a cable that the Hyderabad government had sent the Embassy instructing them to convey to the student that he was to undertake research according to the terms of his scholarship. "See that your government's wishes are carried out in every respect," the letter commanded.

At that time, Harvard University's astrophysics department was home to a galaxy of astrophysicists and astronomers among them Harlowe Shapley, Bart Bok, Donald Menzel, Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin and Fred Whipple. It was Fred Whipple who undertook to write an amusing rejoinder to the bureaucrat. "This is the first occasion in my expe-

rience," Whipple wrote, "in which a foreign government has taken on itself the criticism of our educational methods in the Astronomy Department of Harvard University." It would be better for the Hyderabad government, he suggested, to communicate the reasons for their criticism to the Harvard authorities instead of "reprimanding the student in such a way that he finds it difficult to follow our guidance in his advance education." Whipple then explained that the nature of the discovery was purely accidental - the student's failure to note this unusual object on his photographic plates would have been 'a sin of scientific omission' and his failure to announce the discovery would have been 'a serious neglect of his duty to the scientific world'.

Explaining the importance of background training that is so necessary for doctoral studies, Whipple sardonically pointed out that if the Government insisted on the student confining his research to a narrow field then it had erred in sending him to Harvard for sure.

This delightful exchange is preserved in the Archives of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics because the student in question was none other than their Founder Director M K Vainu Bappu. Bappu's passion for astronomy was kindled early; not unusual given the fact that his father was an astronomer in Nizamia observatory that

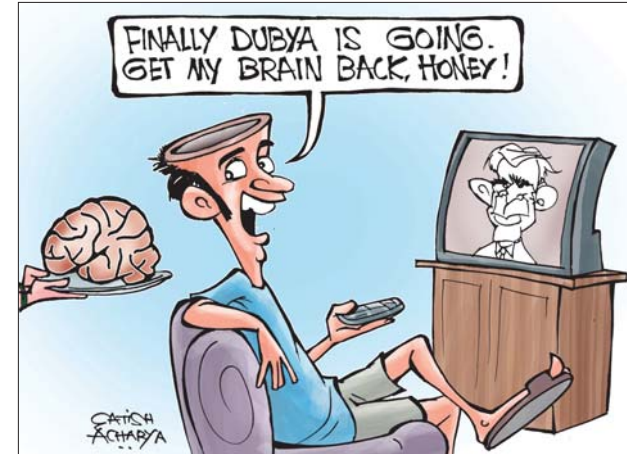
was founded by Nawab Zafar Jung in 1909. In 1948 when the astronomer Harlow Shapley came to India, the twenty-one year old Bappu took the opportunity to meet him. The following year, Bappu set sail for Harvard to do a PhD on 'Photoelectric photometry of Eclipsing Variables'. The Government of Hyderabad had given him a scholarship. That was what stirred up the storm I began this column with.

In 1957 Bappu along with Olin Wilson described what is now called the 'Wilson-Bappu effect' - which opened up for research the field of stellar chromospheres.

After his return to India, Bappu revived optical astronomy in India. In 1971 he was the moving spirit behind the creation of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics. Bappu was also the first Indian President of the International Astronomical Union.

The Indian bureaucracy has not changed much since Bappu's time, where misrecognition all too often masks itself in self-importance.

Even so, I am sure many bureaucrats would be shocked and embarrassed to hear that Bappu remains the only Indian to have a comet named after him - the very same one he had accidentally observed while stargazing at Harvard. That comet is called Bappu-Newkirk-Whipple - after the two discoverers.

**SATISH ACHARYA****LETTER****Can we trust Pakistan?**

Pakistan has finally agreed to coordinate in the 26/11 investigation.

But should we or can we trust Pakistan? After all, they haven't yet agreed to hand over the terrorists to India.

India knows if the 26/11 case is undertaken in Pakistan's court, justice will not be delivered. The steps Pakistan is taking now is just for show, especially because of the pressure on them from the world.

There are chances that Pakistan will be sidelined by the world. So, they have grudgingly agreed to help India in the investigation. India should not agree to fight the case in Pakistan nor send any eyewitness. They should keep pressuring Pakistan to hand

over all the terrorists. In case Pakistan doesn't, India must not hesitate to take military action against them.

**Shailesh Kumar**  
JP Nagar

**What's the brand?**

I read the article 'Wasn't even paid for pants' in MiD DAY dated Jan19, and am surprised that the brand and the company's name have not been disclosed. Why? Rs 86,725 is not a small sum to pay for a vehicle and for the humiliation the consumer has gone through in repairing it and getting it replaced, shouldn't the consumer court take action against the company?

**Pushpa**  
Via email

**POINT OF VIEW****Why punish the employees?**

The Satyam issue has kicked up a storm and brought us face to face with our worst nightmare - that one day such companies can vanish into thin air all of sudden.

Even though virtually all sectors of the Indian economy have grown massively, IT remains one of the key growth engines. If IT catches a cold, the economy can catch a fever.

In the worst case, global investors, who are already pulling out money from markets around the world, may only hurry up to do so out of India.

They would be so spooked that investments in India may eventually dry up. The havoc that such an eventuality can cause on the economy is immeasurable.

But such a reversal looks quite improbable. What can actually happen is that global investors would be spooked to some extent, but may not turn away completely.

Financial regulatory bodies would come up with various measures to plug the loopholes.

The Satyam row has been so dramatic and so dense that it is hard to make sense of all of it at one go.

After the debacle, some of the top companies have gone to the extreme step of treating Satyam and its employees like untouchables.

They have not only categorically refused to participate in a buyout, but have ordered that people from the company should not be hired.

This is sheer over-reaction. Firms are not individuals. A change in management should turn it around once again into a good company.

At the same time, its failure will not only put about 60,000 workers out of jobs, but have an impact on six crore people in other industries too.

prabhudev.m@mid-day.com



Prabhudev M

**Have your say!** We want to hear from YOU. Here's how you can send us your letters, comments and yes, even pictures.

**POST:** Opinion, MiD DAY Infomedia Ltd, 301, Carlton Towers, I, Airport Road, Bangalore 560008 **FAX:** 67016351-53,

**SMS:** Type MAILED followed by your name and message to 53650, **EMAIL:** yourmailbag@mid-day.com