

Minutes of the Meeting of the Research Advisory & Monitoring Committee (RAMC) of the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) held at Noida on 5th March 2012

The Meeting of the Research Advisory and Monitoring Committee was held in Conference Hall, Golf View hotel, Noida on 5th March 2012 under the Chairmanship of Prof. A.K. Koul, Dean Academic Affairs, School of Biosciences & Biotechnology, Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University, Rajouri. The meeting was preceded by a visit to the Botanic garden of Indian Republic (BGIR) and plantation of saplings in the 'Fruit Section' of the garden by all members. The list of members who attended the meeting is placed at Annexure I.

At the outset, Dr Paramjit Singh, Director, BSI, extended a warm welcome to the Chairman and other distinguished members of the Committee. He also expressed his gratitude to Prof. Koul for agreeing to conduct the meeting in a short notice. He hoped for the continued support of Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) that would help BSI achieve its objectives within time targeted schedules.

Prof. Koul expressed his happiness for the presence of ex directors of the Botanical Survey of India, Dr B.D. Sharma and Dr N.P. Singh, who knew about the organization so well, hence could give useful inputs in overall improvement of the organization. He was also glad for the participation of Sri R. Mehta, Advisor (CS) as he can effectively communicate the observations of the Committee to the ministry. The participation of other Directors of various institutions, he contended, can guide this august gathering in suggesting suitable measures for the issues to be deliberated in this meeting. He further clarified that the delay in conducting the meeting is due to his staying away in US and also due to change over of new Director in BSI. The Chairman then invited comments from other members.

Sri Mehta, while thanking the Chairman, regretted that he could not attend the last meeting as he had to stay back at Delhi because the Parliament was in session. He also stated that there shall be soon Program Monitoring Committee which will look into progress of all offices in all their activities at quarterly intervals. He also expressed his concern that there are 30% vacancy positions in BSI making it more difficult to execute all programs on time. This, he stated, is due to out dated recruitment rules which are now being revised, finalized and sent to DOPT. He shared with the Committee that amount of honorarium and contingency were enhanced in case of Emeritus Scientists, and the posts of Senior Administrative Officer, Finance Officer and Administrative Officers, lying vacant for long time, have since been revived. He also emphasized the need for standardization of minimum duration of field tours and the format of tour reports. He also underlined the need for conducting two meetings of RAMC in a year as per its terms of reference. He suggested that there should be some induction training for all BSI recruits so that they can get into survey work of the BSI very easily. He also desired the BSI to come out with a white paper on status of survey and the gaps in terms of geographical area as well as plant group coverage. Dr D.K. Singh informed that the duration of tour depends on the purpose for which it was taken, e.g. field tours aimed at specific collection of species will be of shorter

duration, whereas the ones taken for general exploration of a given area will be of longer duration.

Dr B.D. Sharma emphasized the need for filling of administrative posts so as to relieve scientists from administrative burden. Further, he suggested that Manuals of CITES plants / threatened medicinal plants / emergency food plants in border areas, floras of tourist spots and pollen calendars for all metro cities should be prepared by BSI.

Dr N.P Singh stated that 'Flora India' being the flagship programme of BSI, it should be pursued more vigorously and diversification in research should be minimised in view of sagging strength of the organization. He emphasised that the BSI should organize taxonomy training programmes for university and college teachers.

Dr L.M.S.Palani also stated that 'Flora India' programme should be given due priority. Modernization should also happen in the department. The organization should evolve mechanism to attract youngsters towards taxonomy. It can invite them for 6 months training program in BSI so that they develop some interest in taxonomy as they get experience as to how it is practiced. He felt that the honorarium for Emeritus Scientists is too small and that the BSI should consider offering research grant to associate researchers from universities and other institutions.

Prof. S.C. Srivastava expressed difficulty in getting permissions from State Forest Department for conducting field surveys even under the projects sponsored by the ministry of Environment and Forests – a problem faced by even BSI scientists. Sri Mehta assured to take up the issue with appropriate authorities in the ministry for administrative clearances for conducting field exploration by BSI scientists. Dr. C.S. Nautiyal suggested about the possibilities of collaborative research programmes between BSI and NBRI in the areas mutually identified as per their core competence to generate value added research output.

Dr. P.G. Latha suggested the need of influencing young minds for which children should be involved in various awareness programmes, and that BSI should try and facilitate small working laboratories for children.

Thereafter, the Agenda items were taken up in seriatim.

Agenda Item No. 1: Confirmation of the minutes of last meeting:

Dr P. Venu, informed the Committee that the draft minutes were circulated among the members and only one comment was received from Prof. Srivastava, which was circulated. He therefore, requested that the same may be confirmed. The minutes were later confirmed.

Agenda Item No. 2: Action taken on the decisions of the previous meeting:

- 1. Emphasis on Survey of more challenging biodiversity rich areas:** The Chairman has suggested that the areas completed at the end of 11th plan and the areas projected for the 12th plan should be given in detail with names of protected areas, etc., than

in mere numbers. It was stated that these details are there as part of the 12th Plan Document as well as the Annual Programme for 2012 – 13 which are part of the Agenda Papers.

2. **Funding for herbaria outside Government support:** The proposal for funding was submitted to the Ministry for 22 herbaria with financial implication, which the Planning Commission has agreed to 'in-principle'. Now the ministry has asked for submitting the same in SFC Memo format which will be sent within March 2012.
3. **Enhancement of contingency for Research Fellows under BSI 'Scholarship Scheme':** The issue is pending with MoEF as they sought few clarifications which were replied. The Chairman commented that taxonomy is not the choice of good students. It is also experienced in the past that students without NET qualification do much better than NET qualified students. He further elaborated that NET is a screening test and not a qualification required for JRFs in Botanical Survey and hence should not be linked with enhancement of fellowship on par with CSIR. Further, it was informed by the Director, BSI, that the JRF selection was done on all India basis with a written test followed by an Interview by a Committee of experts that included an external examiner. Sri Mehta suggested that the ministry could be approached again for reconsideration with appropriate justification based on these deliberations.
4. **Expeditious action on part of the ministry towards implementation of the recommendations:** It was appraised that pending issues with regard to positions of Emeritus Scientists, their honorarium and contingency have been cleared by MoEF.
5. **BSI should make documentaries and get its publications reviewed in well circulated journals:** No action was initiated and BSI would now take up this issue with EMRCs and Indian Science Congress office for making the documentaries and publication about the organization in 'Everyman's Science' respectively.
6. **A mechanism to be evolved to include work done by other institutions, towards Survey and documentation of the plant diversity of the country, so that an integrated picture on the survey status can be brought out:** The Chairman expressed his dismay as no action was initiated on this issue. Dr D.K. Singh informed that in the last meeting the support of all the hon'ble members of the Committee was solicited to help BSI with the information on the work done by them or their institutions on these aspects. The matter will be pursued with various research and academic institutions as well as individual botanists to compile the information.

Agenda Item No. 3: Comments on Progress report of BSI between March 2012 and February 2013:

Dr Venu made the presentation on the progress made by the BSI during the period between April 2011 – February 2012 and presented an overview of different activities and achievements in terms of, number of explorations undertaken, documentations done at ecosystem, state, regional and national levels, new discoveries and rediscoveries, ex situ conservation in AJC Bose IBG, BGIR and associated botanic gardens, publications brought out, e-governance initiatives, etc. He also provided a brief overview of the New Programmes proposed for the 12th Five Year Plan which needed additional resources in terms of laboratory infrastructure, finance as well as the man-power. Er A.K. Pathak made a brief

presentation highlighting the proposed new initiatives on various digitisation programmes and establishment of GIS Cell and Bio-Informatics Division in BSI during the 12th Plan.

On recollections of certain taxa after a long interval, the Chairman asked whether the rediscoveries were followed up to know the causes of such rarity, and suitable conservation programmes were taken up. The Chairman also desired to know the status of the threatened species conserved in different botanic gardens across the country under ministry's 'Assistance to Botanic Gardens' scheme as it would help us assess the contribution of these gardens towards *ex situ* conservation of Indian flora.

Sri Mehta commented that in exploration tours GPS coordinates are to be given for the boundaries of the area covered so that the total area covered could be easily assessed.

Agenda Item No. 4: Discussion on 12th Five-Year Plan document and approval of 5-year Research Programme:

The Chairman remarked that the new projects are to be prioritized as the budgets projected are considerable and it is least likely that all the projects will get through. Sri Mehta also suggested that the new programmes, proposed by BSI be prioritised and the project on digitization be phased over a longer period. The Committee felt that the 'Flora of India', which was envisaged to be published in 32 volumes, should be given due priority. The committee suggested taking stock of the pending manuscripts through an internal committee wherein some former Directors could also be involved to expedite its publication.

Agenda Item No. 5: Approval of Annual Research Programme of BSI for 2012 – 13: The Annual Research Programme and the proposals for the time period extension was placed for discussion and approval. The committee asked to revise the Research Programmes for the year 2012 – 13 with clear quantifiable deliverables with the area to be explored during each tour should also be projected, besides the number of tours. The Committee granted following time period extensions.

1. **The Flora of Cold Deserts of Western Himalaya** (due for completion by March 2012): Dr. S. K. Srivastava, Scientist D, NRC, Dehradun made a request for one year extension to complete the. His request was based on his contention that he requires to conduct one additional intensive field trip to Zaskar valley and needs to study some taxa more critically for correct authentication. The Committee approved the extension of the project up to December 2012 after due deliberations.
2. **Flora of Srivilliputhur Wildlife Sanctuary, Tamil Nadu** (due for completion by March 2014): Dr. K. A. A. Kabeer, Scientist C, SRC, Coimbatore made a request for one year extension to complete the project which could not be started from April 2011 due to non receipt of permission from the Forest Department for almost 10 months. The informal permission has recently been accorded. Decision with regard to extension in the life of the project assigned to Dr. Kabeer had been deferred.

Agenda Item No. 6: Appointment of Emeritus Scientist in BSI: BSI received an application for emeritus scientist from Prof. Seetharam, Retd. Professor of Botany, Karnataka Association for Advancement of Science, Central College Campus, Bangalore which was reviewed by 3 experts and the comments were placed before the Committee. The

Committee concurred with reviewers' views in connection with Prof. Seetharam's application and hence not recommended it for consideration. With regard to prospective Emeritus Scientists it was categorically decided that they will be assigned the Flora of India work. The Committee also suggested that instead of asking prospective scientists to submit the proposals and looking at its feasibility or suitability to the department, BSI should revise the guidelines for Emeritus Scientists particularly with regard to area of work to be assigned to them based on gap area recognition. This may be advertised in journals like Current science.

Towards the end Dr A.A. Mao, Scientist E, APRC, Itanagar; Dr B.K. Sinha, Scientist E, ERC, Shillong; Dr S.K. Srivastava, Scientist D, NRC, Dehradun and Dr H.C. Pande, Scientist D, NRC, Dehradun made presentations on (i) Ericaceae of Arunachal Pradesh, (ii) Flora Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam, (iii) Flora of Cold Deserts of N.W. Himalaya and (iv) Pteridophytic Flora of Western Himalaya respectively to provide a glimpse of the diversity met in these groups/area.

Recommendations:

The following recommendations emerged from the deliberations

1. All rediscoveries of plant species to be followed up with its conservation/restoration plan. **(Action: BSI)**
2. BSI to review its 'Flora of India' programme through a small Committee of its senior scientists and former Directors and to expedite its publication. **(Action: BSI)**
3. The enhancement of contingency for research fellows under BSI Scholarship Scheme should be pursued with the ministry again, with appropriate justification, for reconsideration based on the deliberations in RAMC. **(Action: BSI, MoEF)**
4. BSI should invite proposals for Emeritus Scientist positions to work on its own prioritised areas
5. BSI to prepare 'Identification Manuals' of plant groups covered by it under AICOPTAX. **(Action: BSI, MoEF)**

The meeting ended with vote of thanks by Dr. Venu.

Prof. A.K. Koul
Chairman, RAMC, BSI

Annexure-I

List of Participants

1.	Prof. A.K. Koul	Chairman
2.	Sri R. Mehta, Advisor (CS), MoEF	Member
3.	Dr C.S. Nautiyal, Director, NBRI, Lucknow	Member
4.	Dr LMS Palni, Director, GBPIHED, Almora	Member
5.	Dr P.G. Latha, Director, TBGRI, Trivendrum	Member
6.	Prof. S.C. Srivastava, Lucknow	Member
7.	Dr P. Singh, Director, BSI	Member
8.	Dr D.K. Singh, Scientist F, BSI	Member
9.	Dr B.D. Sharma, Ex Director, BSI	Special Invitee
10.	Dr N.P. Singh, Ex Director, BSI	Special Invitee
11.	Dr Ashish Kumar, Deputy Director (CS), MoEF	Invitee
12.	Er A.K. Pathak, Scientist F (IT), BSI	Invitee
13.	Dr A.A. Mao, Scientist E, BSI	Invitee
14.	Dr B.K. Sinha, Scientist E, BSI	Invitee
15.	Dr S.K. Srivastva, Scientist D, BSI	Invitee
16.	Dr H.C. Pande, Scientist D, BSI	Invitee
17.	Dr M. Ahmedullah, Scientist D, BSI	Invitee
18.	Dr P. Venu, Scientist F, BSI	Invitee