

May 3, 2018

Dear friends,

As all of you are aware, CSIR has advertised the post of director CECRI but, I would be here, for some more time till a worthy successor would be identified by the competent authority. The seven years that I have had relished at CECRI, first as Acting Director (beginning May 1, 2011) and then as the 13th Director, were both exciting and challenging. Exciting because I had the opportunity to be intimately associated with the academic, social and cultural activities of this Institute; the excitement was buttressed by the fact that I was in company with mainstream electrochemists that only CECRI can boast of. It was also challenging because this period witnessed adoption of game-changing policies in CSIR, designed to stay competitive at the international level. More significantly, I joined “*straight from my lab*” with virtually no administrative experience, but an implicit passion for all aspects of electrochemistry, including products, processes, teaching, research and nurturing innovations.

I for one would like to imagine what it could have been rather than what it is. In that vein, I would not claim any spectacular transformation. However, we have collectively accomplished many remarkable things during the past six years, some of which are

- B Tech syllabus restructuring; filling-up of other state quota
- Increased PhD student enrolment; Student Academic Council; more academic collaborations (MoUs with NIT-Trichy, VIT, PMU, etc.)
- Start-ups for new scientists; interdisciplinary projects
- Enhanced revenue generation from industry, Industrial Conclave at Chennai
- ERP; Biometry; CECRI e-mail
- New facilities at the Health Centre (X-ray scan, physiotherapy, electronic counts, etc.)
- More central funding through projects such as MULTIFUN, INTELCOAT, etc.
- Sophisticated instrumental facility; transparent user policy; 3D Metal Printing Facility
- Sewage treatment plant; vermi-compost
- Increased activity with clear documentation and visibility in the functioning of NCCI, SAEST, Shishu Vidyalaya
- Installation of a bust of Dr. Alagappa Chettiar; renovation of the Abdul Kalam Auditorium
- Flood-lit Volleyball and Basketball courts; Tennis court; Food vending machine

A few of these were, of course, initiated by my predecessors, but we worked very hard to get them completed in time. I am starved of words to express my gratitude and appreciation. We journeyed together through hard times, learnt many new tricks, often inviting long-simmering criticisms, but the journey by all measures was deeply satisfying. In this, we were guided by four DGs, two RC chairmen, distinguished RC members and academicians. We were also fortunate to have had the services of two Joint Secretaries, COAs, FAOs and SPOs, who ensured a smooth sail of the administration. Two sections, TTBD and PPMG, in particular, played a pivotal role in creating the necessary synergy with Purchase, Finance and Administration. The many Skill Development and Industrial Training programs continue to garner accolades from CSIR and other agencies.

We saw many dignitaries visiting this campus including Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, Shri. P. Chidambaram (former Home Minister), Prof. Samir K. Brahmachari (former DG-CSIR) and Dr. Harsh Vardhan (the Honorable Minister of Science & Technology). The success of these visits makes me proud about the legacy of the Institution and fortitude of our people.

I am delighted to share the news that our latest FTP technology, the Portable Soil Test Sensor Kit, won much appreciation at the Kisan Mela 2018. We are now in the process of patenting this technology.

Another FTP program related to Thermal Barrier Coating is a strategically important one; similarly, the large-level Zinc-Bromine Redox Flow program is of much national importance in the energy sector. I would like to see our Lithium-Ion battery technology reaching the beneficiaries. This will not, however, happen if complacency gets the upper hand. All of you, especially the young scientists, excel not only in research and teaching, but also in other domains such as stock verification, skill development and outreach activities, adding to our reputation and prestige. Each one of you has had his/her share, however incremental it may be, in leapfrogging the status of this Institute to one among the best CSIR laboratories in the past six years.

A major achievement is publication of selected papers presented at iSAEST-11 in a special volume of the *International Journal of Hydrogen Energy*. A large number of papers have been published in high-impact journals as well. The past six years have also witnessed a four-fold increase in the number of doctoral students and nearly a three-fold increase in revenue generation. The resultant increase in research output has helped us gain a higher degree of competence and increased visibility among the global electrochemical fraternity. We have been also fortunate to get unprecedented attention and support of DG, CSIR so that resources were available in time to equip with state-of-the-art instruments and to support more students and postdoctoral fellows in our Institute. We received three “Young Scientist” awards and many of our staff and students made commendable achievements both globally and nationally. I have also expanded my knowledge horizon in many areas of, not only electrochemistry, but in diverse sectors of administration, finance, purchase and project management from many of you and some incredibly precious relationships with few close friends in Karaikudi. I feel contented and satisfied if few staff members and students feel inspired to work with full potential.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to introspect goals set at the beginning, see where and why we faltered, and examine ways to circumvent barriers to progress. I would have been happier, if we could have accomplished something as outstanding as to merit an academic footprint by way of, say, a paper in a journal of high visibility. We also could not create a start-up / incubation centre, despite all the planning. Among my failures, I would count my inability to create a Badminton Court and a 24x7 Cafeteria, to demonstrate Ten Flagship Technologies, and establish a structure for student evaluation of teachers (BTech and PhD). Of course, we created a Business Strategy Group to ensure that each scientist has at least one project. However, a flippant attitude compounded by the comfort of job security among a few senior and middle-level scientists came in its way. Please remember that the only way to address the common complaint that our output is not commensurate with freedom and facilities is to work tirelessly on industrial projects and ensure timely delivery. Boeing, NTPC, DRDO, Oil India and Colgate Palmolive continue to be our big sponsors because they have confidence in our abilities. The less-accomplished must learn from those who continue to win big projects lest they should fare poorly in peer assessment.

A lot of things happened during the last Quarter (celebration of Safety Day, National Science Day, International Women's Day); we also continue to win accolades and recognitions. All these have been listed in the administrative collegium. I would not repeat them for want of space. However, I am particularly pleased that the CECRI cricket and volleyball teams, in an unprecedented display of sportsmanship, played in the FINALS of the 49th SSBM (Outdoor) Tournament. I am also happy that our staff can avail themselves of the creche facility at a nominal fee.

Many of our scientists make unproductive wrangling over credits, leadership or extent of collaboration rather than focusing on technology delivery. I request all such friends to be considerate. We need to correct our shortcomings, be accommodative, and try to resolve issues by frank dialog. It is also necessary to avoid overlap of research activities, especially transgression into areas alien to one's division. If the past is an indicator of the future (especially since our average impact factor now is 3.8 and our ECF is 9.3 crores- so far time highest), we need not unduly worry about policy changes, for our skill-sets, especially

in corrosion protection, power sources and electroplating, are so unique as to continue to roll out cutting-edge technologies. Our administration, purchase, finance, support divisions, scientists, technical staff members and students have always worked with a unifying spirit for common goals. Let us pledge once more to work with more dedication and with a stronger commitment for a more luminous CSIR.

Despite its locational disadvantages, a bright future with new opportunities and challenges beckons CECRI. I am confident the Institute will live up to its *raison d'être*, with each one of you, including some anonymous heroes, ably shouldering your part in a common endeavor. Let me thank each one of you once again for your unconditional support and sustained enthusiasm.

Best Wishes,
Vijay