

Science Congress to steer clear of mythology

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NEW DELHI: Stung by the widespread backlash over the inclusion of pseudo-science at the 2015 Indian Science Congress, organisers of its January 2016 edition have said the forum will steer clear of mythology or anything that doesn't have a

"scientific basis."

"Nothing without a scientific basis or any form of story telling will be allowed at the Science Congress. I've strongly resisted some attempts this year too and only proven facts will be allowed to be presented," said Ashok Kumar Saxena, general president, Indian Sci-

ence Congress Association (ISCA).

The Science Congress, organised by the ISCA, is a century-old annual meeting that draws Nobel science laureates, NRI scientists, Indian researchers and hordes of students.

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Though less a forum for discussing new research, it always has the Prime Minister in attendance and over the years, has morphed into a forum for India's political class — since Jawaharlal Nehru — to comment on the state of Indian science as well as proclaim the country's expectations from its scientists.

The conference is supported by the Ministry of Science and Technology.

Last year, the Science Congress in Mumbai was Narendra Modi's first as Prime Minister.

Along with lectures by eminent Indian-American researchers there was a special session, inaugurated by Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar called "Ancient Sciences Through Sanskrit." The highlight of the session, that later on was widely condemned, was a presentation by a former pilot, Anand Bodas, who claimed that Indian sages knew how to build planet-

hopping spacecraft.

He sourced his information to an "ancient, Vedic text" called the Vyamnik Shastra. Aerospace scientist, H.S. Mukunda, a former professor at the Indian Institute of Science, co-authored a 1974 article, Scientific Opinion, to argue that not only were the planes described in Vyamnik Shastra un-flyable, but even the very book was written not earlier than 1922.

Dr. Saxena said that "criticism" last year had made the organisation more circumspect about including science and Sanskrit sessions and the focus this year would be on "Made in India" rather than Mr. Modi's own more-encompassing slogan of 'Make in India.' There would be sessions on the progress made in addressing cancer, Swachh Bharat and indigenous drug development and the theme would be indigenous development, he added.

The conference this year

will be held in the first week of January at Mysore University. K. Rangappa, Vice-Chancellor, Mysore University and a key organiser, said that while there wouldn't be a focus on ancient sciences, India's historical contribution to science wouldn't be ignored. "The final list of papers is still being finalised. India's contributions may be mentioned as part of individual sessions," he added.

However, those who organised the Sanskrit and science components say they aren't taking part this year because they hadn't been invited. Vijnana Bharati, the organisation that coordinated the session last year, said that they were conducting their own conference, called Astra Conference, in Pune's Deccan University, on the heels of the Science Congress. "We didn't have time for participating this time and moreover weren't invited, like last year," said Prashant Holay, who heads the organisation's Nagpur unit.