

Anna University in plagiarism scandal

The Journal of Materials Science is inquiring into a curious case of plagiarism involving scientists from Anna University and the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR), both in Chennai.

The international journal, published by Springer, is investigating how it ended up publishing their research paper that is 'essentially a reproduction' of an article published a year earlier in the US journal, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS).

Although titles are different, both the papers deal with ionic conductivity in 'doped cerium dioxide,' a material that can be used in the manufacture of fuel cells.

In a correction published online, Barry Carter, editor of JMS, says the paper from India 'does not just plagiarize the results presented in the PNAS paper but actually copies most of it word for word'.

He says JMS is thoroughly investigating 'to determine who was complicit in the fabrication'.

The journal is also in contact with officials at the two institutions whose scientists were named as co-authors of the paper.

Three of the four authors - Tom Mathews of IGCAR, physicist Subramanian Selladurai of Anna University and Roshan Bokalawela currently at the University of Oklahoma (US) -- have distanced themselves from the tainted paper.

In email interviews, Mathews and Selladurai told IANS their names were added 'without their knowledge or concurrence' by K. Muthukkumar, the paper's first author and a PhD student of Selladurai.

Muthukkumar, who is currently in Germany, has already apologised to the editor of JMS and authors of the original PNAS paper.

He says he committed the 'mistake' of sending to JMS the manuscript written by a ghost writer without realising that the writer had simply copied the PNAS paper. But he believes he was made a scapegoat in the entire affair and added that his mouth was sealed because he was a student.

David Andersson of the Royal Institute of Technology (Sweden) and principal author of the PNAS paper says the event, though 'unpleasant', should not reflect on the great number of Indian scientists conducting high-quality research.

'I just hope that the corresponding universities will apply efforts to prevent such cases in the future,' he told this reporter.

'I am extremely sad that my faculty is involved in this sordid affair,' P.K. Palanisamy, head of physics department at Anna University, told IANS, adding that it was the first time such an incident had happened in his university.

He said that after an internal inquiry, the university has barred Selladurai from guiding any more doctoral students.

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