

# Indian biotechnologists protest against management practices

Senior scientists at the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology have demanded their director's removal.

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There's a whiff of revolt at the New Delhi unit of the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB). In a step embarrassing the ICGEB governing board, a majority of senior scientists of the unit have expressed "no confidence" in their director Virandar Chauhan and have demanded his removal. The allegations against Chauhan range from mismanagement to lack of transparency and favouritism.

Chauhan did not deny that the scientists have complained against him. He said that the issues raised by these scientists had been resolved. "All issues raised about the running of the Centre by a group of anxious scientists have been addressed," he told Nature India.

In a letter — signed by 24 out of 30 scientists in senior positions at the New Delhi campus — the protestors have asked ICGEB director general Francisco Baralle to advise Chauhan to step down. Chauhan has been the director for the centre for last 15 years. The scientists have expressed displeasure at Chauhan's extension till the end of this year despite the recommendation of ICGEB's council of scientific advisors in October 2012 for "a formal review of Prof. Chauhan's performance as Component Director".

Baralle did not respond to a question on how he proposed to handle the revolt. However, he told the protestors in a letter dated December 18, 2012 that he needed to follow procedures. "The change of director or the new structure of the Delhi Component cannot be established without the agreement of the Indian authorities," he said.

Krishnaswamy Vijayaraghavan, who took charge of India government's Department of Biotechnology on January 28, 2013 told Nature India that any action on complaints against Chauhan will be decided "after a detailed investigation of the charges."

The complaints against Chauhan include lack of transparency in distribution of resources and hiring, victimisation of scientists and favouritism to certain research groups including his own on malaria. While a plant biology group was closed down, Chauhan created a new group on biofuels which he headed himself, it was alleged in the letter, a copy of which was made available to Nature India.

Nature India

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ICGEB has been functioning since 1994 as an autonomous, intergovernmental organization in the UN system with campuses in Trieste (Italy), New Delhi (India) and Cape Town (South Africa). The New Delhi component has till now been financed by Italy and India with 60% (\$3 million) funds coming from Italy.

However, this is likely to change from next year with Italy's decision to reduce its contribution

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