

ASTRONOMY & ASTROPHYSICS PROGRAMME

Coordinator : S A Leelananda

The objective of the IFS Astronomy Programme is to promote and stimulate the study of Astronomy in Sri Lanka. However, its long term aim is to form a group of young astronomers engaged in Astronomical and Astrophysical research in Sri Lanka.

It is important to point out at this time that Astronomy is not and has not been an active area of research in Sri Lanka. It is neither taught at university or secondary school level on a regular basis although university courses have been offered occasionally.

Considering the importance of Astronomy as a fundamental science, the IFS is taking great effort and interest to promote the study of Astronomy in Sri Lanka with the hope that it will eventually become an active area of research in the future.

With these aims in mind the IFS has launched a programme to promote and stimulate the study of Astronomy. But the efforts are somewhat hampered by the unavailability of practicing Astronomers in Sri Lanka to take an active role although Sri Lanka has produced a few first Astronomers. The programme was reactivated when I joined the IFS in June 1987.

A three week residential National Workshop was held from 03 - 21 August 1987. Twenty young scientists selected to represent institutions throughout the Island participated in the workshop which was directed by Dr George V Coyne, Director of the Vatican Observatory. During the workshop, participants were exposed to basic concepts and theories in Astronomy and Astrophysics, and to some observational sessions using small telescopes. The workshop has been very successful and there had been useful interactions among the participants themselves and with Dr Coyne.

The success of the workshop can be better judged by the follow-up programme agreed upon at the end of the workshop and carried out to expectations. The follow-up programme consisted of four parts.

1. The formation of the IFS Astronomy Circle:

The Astronomy Circle has been meeting regularly every month for a day of activity of lectures and discussions. We are able to invite some interested school children to some of these meetings to stimulate their interest in Astronomy.

2. Donation of a telescope:

Dr Coyne has donated an eight-inch telescope to be used by the Astronomy Circle. The telescope is on its way and it is expected to organize observational sessions for interested groups and school children on its arrival

3. University course on Astronomy & Astrophysics:

A regular course on Astronomy and Astrophysics will be given by Dr S A Leelananda, Physics Department, University of Peradeniya, to physics major students starting from next academic year. Dr Coyne has kindly agreed to help in the organization of this course.

4. Regional Workshop:

A regional workshop has been tentatively planned for August 1988 to bring young Astronomers from neighbouring countries so that our young people will have an opportunity to interact with their counterparts. The second workshop that had been planned for December 1987 could not be held because Dr Asoka Mendis had to cancel his visit due to illness. We expect to continue these activities during 1988 to the best of our ability.
