

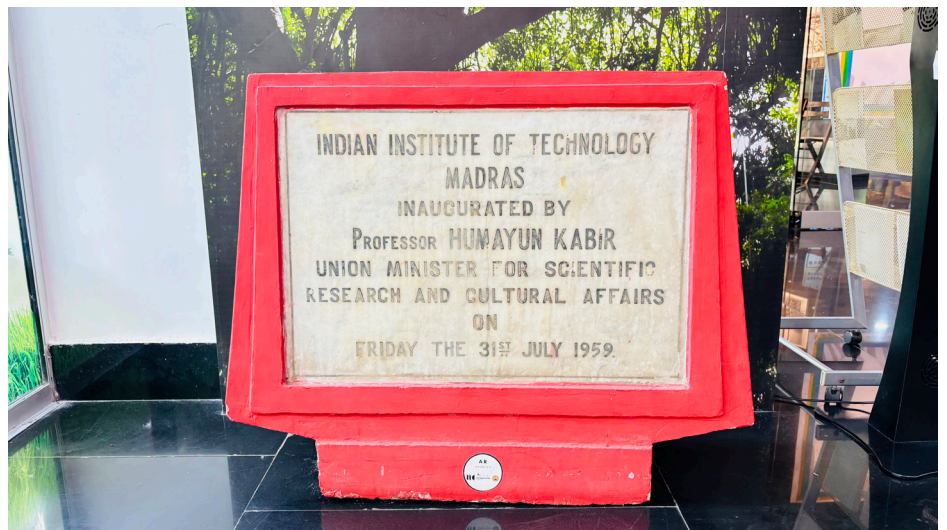


Serendipitous Discoveries

You never know what nugget of information you will find when flipping through any publication in the Heritage Centre's reading zone, that collection of writings IITMian. You may unearth a treasure that helps you connect dots. What you find may give you insights into significant traits of the institute. At the least, you will add to your collection of IIT Madras fun facts.

The Trajectory of a Stone

The other day, I was going through an issue of *Campastimes*, and I found in it a mention of IITM's inaugural stone.



The inaugural stone of IIT Madras, on display at the Heritage Centre. It reminds the viewer that the institute was officially born on 31 July 1959. The stone is carved in marble and set in cement.

This stone greets me on a daily basis now, being placed strategically as it is at the entrance of the Heritage Centre. But even during my student days at the institute, I had encountered it repeatedly. It stood outdoors then, in the 1980s, outside the main entrance of HSB.

The stone had been unveiled by Minister Humayun Kabir at the inaugural ceremony of IIT Madras in 1959. A newspaper report about the event is somewhat non-specific about the venue: it simply says that it was held 'in Guindy'. According to unverified information, the foundation stone had been laid somewhere between AC Tech, CLRI and Kotturpuram. I had wondered if anyone would ever be able to shed light on where particularly the tablet had been placed.

And now here was this article in *Campastimes*. It had been written by T.S. Ananthu, of the second batch of students of IIT Madras. In 1960, Ananthu came across an advertisement about admissions. Having never heard of the institute, he 'was inclined to regard it as a hoax!' According to Ananthu, he replied to the advertisement 'to satisfy his conscience'. He was taken aback when he received an interview card.

Gentlemen, you must have heard of sons being under the care of the father or the mother, or some disabled men being under the care of a hospital, or, if you stretch your imagination too far, of some husbands being under the care of their wives. But ever heard of an educational institution 'under the care of' another one? I hope you will not refuse to believe me if I tell you that our great Institute was at that time under the care of the A. C. College of Technology.

The above fact was mentioned in bold letters on my interview card, and that was about the only indication I had regarding the location of the Institute. The next day I searched for it for two full hours in and around the A. C. College, the College of Engineering and the Central Leather Research Institute, and was just beginning to think that the whole thing was a big hoax when lo and behold! I saw a foundation stone coming up from the ground on which was written:—

**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY,
MADRAS, INAUGURATED BY PROF.
HUMAYUN KABIR ON 31st JULY,
1959.**

I looked about eagerly, hoping to have a glimpse of the huge buildings bearing the renowned name of I.I.T. But try as I might, the only thing that came into my view was the cactus plant growing to my left. Finally, I gave up, and decided to have a cup of tea at the Leather Institute canteen and go back home. I heard a lot of noise coming from one room and concluded that that must be the canteen. Imagine my surprise when, on enter-

Excerpt from T.S. Ananthu's article titled 'Those Good Old Days', written in his third year. Source: Campastimes, Volume I, Issue 2, 15 September 1962

As you can see from the excerpt reproduced here, Ananthu's article provides evidence, as specific as can be hoped for, about the original positioning of the inaugural stone. One feels happy with primary first-hand evidence.

But the 1959–1960 location had been only the starting point of a trajectory. How long did the stone stand in the wilderness after Ananthu saw it there? When was it re-planted close to HSB? Do any alumni have the answers? Do any of the books and reports at the Heritage Centre's reading room hold the information?

Just Casual: The Institute and the Prize

On another occasion, I was going through the IIT Madras annual report of 1963–1964 for some information. I was looking at the section relating to the Physics Department, specifically a table of 'seminar topics', when this caught my eye:

- | | | | |
|-----|------------|--------------------|---|
| 12. | 12- 1-1964 | Sir Lawrence Bragg | “ Television Talks on electricity and magnetism.” |
|-----|------------|--------------------|---|

Lawrence Bragg had won the Nobel Prize in Physics when he was just 25 years old. He had developed X-ray crystallography. He had been the Director of the Cavendish Laboratory when the structure of DNA was discovered. And the not-quite-five-years-old institute had hosted him!

IITM has a reputation of being shy when talking of its own achievements. But you may feel that to mention a visit of a Nobel laureate with such reserve is carrying modesty to extremes.

Incidentally, if you search the Internet, you will find videos of a number of lectures given by Lawrence Bragg. Apparently he had delivered a number of talks on physics topics for young people at the Royal Institution. Films of these lectures were commissioned and subsequently shot on the premises of the Royal Institution.

At any rate, the note set me thinking of the associations IIT Madras has had with the Nobel Prize.

I have mentioned how Dr. C.V. Raman was associated with the institute even when its birth was being discussed (see 'A Little Known Link', Letter from the Heritage Centre, 8 November 2016). In 1966, Dr. C.V. Raman visited the campus. He was the chief guest at the third convocation of the institute.

I was reminded of our recent recording of Prof. G. Rangarajan's oral history video, in which he mentions that he was once at a marketplace in Oxford. Standing next to him, buying vegetables, was Dorothy Hodgkin. She was the recipient of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1964 for determining the structure of vitamin B12.

Apart from Lawrence Bragg and C.V. Raman, there have been a number of Nobel laureate visitors to IIT Madras.

Here is a casually drawn up list: Linus Pauling (Chemistry, 1954; Peace, 1962) visited in 1967; John Bardeen (Physics, 1956; Physics, 1972) in 1977; Richard Ernst (Chemistry, 1991) in 1993; Yuan T. Lee (Chemistry, 1986) in 2004; The 14th Dalai Lama (Peace, 1989) in 2015; Kailash Satyarthi (Peace, 2014) in 2019; David J. Gross (Physics, 2004) in 2020; Didier P. Queloz (Physics, 2019) in 2022.

Happy to say, two Nobel Laureates have visited the Heritage Centre in the last few years: Brian Schmidt (Physics, 2011) in 2023 and Brian Kobilka (Chemistry, 2012) in 2024.



Above; Prof. R. Nagarajan presenting Dr. Brian Kobilka a copy of Campaschimes, 18 July 2024

Below; The author and Prof. R. Nagarajan in conversation with Dr. Brian Schmidt, 2 March 2023

On 13 February 2023, we went one step further, if that is the term to use, when we hosted Carl-Henrik Heldin at the Heritage Centre. He is the Chairman of the Nobel Foundation Board. Dr. Heldin paid close attention to my explanations as I showed him around.

But IITM–Nobel associations are not limited to visits by N. laureates. This I found out through a particularly grand serendipitous discovery. A few weeks back I was at the Materials Science Research Centre to meet Prof. M.S. Ramachandra Rao, who heads InCent-LGD, the lab-grown diamond centre of IIT Madras.

And the discovery is that Prof. Rao had been invited by the Nobel Committee for Physics to recommend the recipient of the Nobel Prize for Physics: not once, but twice—in 2009 and in 2021.

ROYAL SWEDISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
NOBEL COMMITTEE FOR PHYSICS



Professor M. S. Ramachandra Rao

On behalf of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences we, as members of the Nobel Committee for Physics, have the honour of inviting you to submit proposals for the award of

The Nobel Prize in Physics for 2009

According to the Rules of the Nobel Foundation the discovery or invention should be indicated for which the award is proposed and reasons given for the suggestion. Work done long ago may be selected for the award only on the supposition that its significance has until recently not been fully appreciated.

The person nominating a candidate is requested, neither to make known his nomination, nor to inform his nominee of the nomination.

A summary of the regulations governing awards is appended as well as a form which may be used for the proposal of candidate(s).

Proposals, which should be addressed to The Nobel Committee for Physics, Box 50005, S-104 05 Stockholm, Sweden, can only be considered if received by the Committee not later than 31 January 2009. The street address (for express mail delivery) is Lilla Frescativägen 4. Please note that fax or e-mail should not be used.

Stockholm, September 2008

JOSEPH NORDGREN
CHAIRSMAN

BOIJE JOHANSSON

BJÖRN JONSSON

LARS BRINK

INGEMAR LUNDSTRÖM

LARS BERGSTRÖM
SECRETARY



THE NOBEL COMMITTEE
FOR PHYSICS
THE ROYAL SWEDISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

Prof. Dr. MS Ramachandra Rao

PIN code: 3DKQEPF4

On behalf of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, the Nobel Committee for Physics has the honour of inviting you to nominate for

The Nobel Prize in Physics for 2021

The Nobel Prize in Physics was bequeathed in the last will and testament of Alfred Nobel, who desired that the Prize be given to a recipient “*who shall have made the most important discovery or invention within the field of physics*”. The Prize should therefore be rewarded for a particular, especially important scientific accomplishment, and not for the lifetime achievement of a person, no matter how impressive that may be. The discovery or invention should have had an impact on the evolution of physics as a science, or shown the usefulness of physics for society, thereby having “*conferred the greatest benefit to humankind*”.

The Nobel Prize in Physics can be awarded to at most three recipients. Work done long ago may be selected for the award only on the supposition that its significance has until recently not been fully appreciated. A summary of the regulations governing the Nobel Prizes is appended.

You may submit up to three different proposals for the Prize, each with a separate motivation and at most three recipients. We encourage you to take a wide perspective, including e.g. inventions and female candidates. You are expected to treat this invitation and your nomination as highly confidential. All nominations must be made by individuals, and not by a group of nominators.

You are invited to submit your nomination electronically through the on-line nomination system, see instructions on the reverse side of this letter. Alternatively, you may submit it as hard copy, using the appended form, by regular mail to The Nobel Committee for Physics, Box 50005, SE-104 05 Stockholm, Sweden. For express mail delivery, the street address is Lilla Frescativägen 4A, SE-114 18 Stockholm. Please note that fax or e-mail should not be used.

To be considered, your nomination must reach us not later than **January 31, 2021**.

For questions concerning the nomination procedure, please contact physics@nva.se.

Stockholm, September 2020

MATS LARSSON
CHAIR

ULF DANIELSSON

THORS HAGSTRÖM

DAVID HAVILAND

ANDERS BRACK

EVA OLSSON

GUNNAR ENGELMAN
SECRETARY

Letters from the Nobel Committee for Physics requesting Prof. M.S.R. Rao to recommend recipients. The confidentiality periods of the letters have expired.

Such then are the multiple connections that the institute has had with the Prize hitherto, including recommending recipients.

Kumaran Sathasivam

Your response to Letter from Heritage Centre is welcome.
Please send mail to heritage@iitm.ac.in.
The Heritage Centre is located in the ground floor of the Administration Building, IIT Madras.
It is open on weekdays from 9.30 am to 7.00 pm
heritage.iitm.ac.in