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**PAGE ONE**

**Toy story: A scientist, two countries & a bag full of playthings**

*Arvind Gupta from IUCAA travelled to Pakistan to talk about science education & believes the hostile divide is artificial*

**Rituparna Bhuyan**

**Pune, April 9:** HE embarked on a journey that he had dreamt of for the last 30 years of his life. And he took with him a bag full of toys.

Sound as it may like a story out of folklore, for Arvind Gupta it was a journey to spread the knowledge of science. Two weeks ago, Gupta — the in-charge of the children science centre at Inter University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) — left on his mission to Pakistan.

“I have visited 15 countries to talk on education and popularisation of science, but never had a chance to visit Pakistan. It was a dream come true,” says Gupta, who is known for his uncanny ability to transform discarded junk into toys to explain complex science phenomena.

The objective of this journey was to conduct workshops for school children and teachers in Pakistan and share his experiences on education as well as science education. The journey across the border took root when Pervez Amirali Hoodbhoy, the eminent scientist from Pakistan, visited IUCAA two years ago. “He had seen the children science centre and was impressed. He wrote to me two months ago, inviting me to visit schools as well as other educational institutes in Pakistan,” adds Gupta.

With 150 toys — made from discarded material — packed in his luggage, he

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set off on a journey which took him to more than 10 schools in Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad and Hyderabad. "I visited Karachi Grammar School, Beacon House Group of Schools in Karachi, Kharmiya School in Islamabad, as well schools for the underprivileged," he recalls.

Incidentally Gupta's work on popularising science found takers in Pakistan much before his visit. "Hyderabad-based Transformation for Rural Development has been using many of the articles on popularising science, education as well as anti nuclear issues posted on my website. They have translated the articles into Sindhi and I also released one such compilation."

During the course of his interactions, Gupta not only spoke about science education but also taught the students to make science toys which could be used to perform experiments. The high point of the visit was the lecture at the Quaid-e-Azam University auditorium in Islamabad, which was packed to capacity. "After the lecture was over, I was mobbed for more than an hour by the university students. They were very interested in the toys that I had displayed," Gupta fondly adds.

In Pakistan, he also interacted with teachers in Karachi and Lahore. The last few days were spent at the Ali Institute of Education, a premier teacher training institute, where he conducted a workshop for more than 100 teachers.

Back on home turf, Gupta realises the futility of the tensions between the two neighbouring countries. "This is a very artificial divide that exists between us. We are bound by history, tradition, language, music and so many different spectrums of culture." After living through a long cherished dream, Gupta now wants to further the association with the people who romanced his toys on the other side of the border.

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