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'Tap thorium deposits to meet country's energy needs'

Traditional beginning: K. Padmanabhan, Professor of Eminence, Anna University, Chennai, inaugurates an International Conference on Advanced Materials and Composites organised by the National Institute for Interdisciplinary Science and Technology in the city on Wednesday.

Special Correspondent

Synthetic rutile plant to be set up in Kochi

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Kerala has the potential to emerge as a major supplier of nuclear fuel for the country's atomic power plants, according to S. Banerjee, Director, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Mumbai.

Presiding over the inaugural function of the International Conference on Advanced Materials and Composites (ICAMC-2007) organised by National Institute for Interdisciplinary Science and Technology (NIIST) here on Wednesday, Mr. Banerjee said the huge atomic mineral deposits in Kerala could be tapped to meet the energy needs of the country for several centuries.

Mr. Banerjee said the uranium ore deposits in India were insufficient to meet the future energy requirements of the country. "However, we have one-third of the total thorium deposits in the world. The fast breeder reactors developed by India can convert non-fissile thorium to fissile uranium. Once this indigenous technology is implemented, our energy needs can be fulfilled for several centuries to come," he said.

Inaugurating the conference, K. Padmanabhan, Professor of Eminence, Anna University, Chennai, spoke about the need to rejuvenate old technologies and innovate new ones for the development of the nation. He said information technology was going to play a major role in the evolution of new interdisciplinary subjects like material informatics, which deals with data mining, data processing and data storage related to materials science and technology.

P.K. Rohatgi and A.D. Damodaran, the former directors of NIIST, addressed the inaugural session. In his speech, Mr. Rohatgi hailed the scientists at NIIST for the development of advanced materials such as light alloys, metal matrix composites, ceramics and polymers.

Mr. Damodaran appreciated the NIIST Scientists for developing technology for conversion of ilmenite to synthetic rutile and the transfer of technology to Cochin Minerals and Rutiles Ltd., Kochi. A synthetic rutile plant with Rs.100 crore investment is coming up in Kochi based on NIIST technology, he added.

Earlier, the souvenir and conference proceedings were released by Mr. Banerjee and Mr. Padmanabhan respectively. T.K. Chandrashekar, Director, NIIST, and Dr. B.C. Pai, Senior Deputy Director, also spoke.

More than 400 delegates from across the world are attending the three-day conference. Sixty invited speakers from India, the U.S., Russia, U.K., Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Sweden, Australia, Brazil, Singapore and Thailand would deliver lectures in various areas of advanced materials and composites.

The Indian speakers include directors and scientists from the CSIR, DRDO, ISRO and DAE and professors from IISc, IITs, NITs and various universities. Around 230 contributory papers in the form of oral presentations and

posters are being presented at the conference.