

## Jargon-free technical reports

It used to be said of the Nobel Laureate in Physics, C. V. Raman, that he was able to present complex scientific topics even to lay audiences with astounding clarity. I have myself attended a couple of meetings addressed by him on the Raman Effect and his research in crystallography when I was just a teenager, and I can vouch for his impressive flair for establishing instant rapport with all sections of his audiences.

His writings too, published in popular journals, were equally free of gobbledegook. The quality was shared by John Maynard Keynes and John Kenneth Galbraith as well. It is a pleasure even today to read their books — so smooth flowing and so elegant in style and diction, laced with a sense of humour.

Subramanya Bharathi, the great Tamil poet, had an explanation for this unique gift. It is clarity in thinking, he said, that led to clarity in presentation. For expressions to be lucid and the meaning to sink into the reader's and listener's mind instantly, the prime pre-requisite was clear-headedness and absolute command over the subject.

Unfortunately, though, convoluted speaking or writing is mistaken for erudition, especially on technical subjects. Many speaking or writing on such subjects think that if they are easily understood, people may consider them lightweights. Actually, that was the fate of the Harvard economist Galbraith. His writings and speeches earned great appreciation from the people at large, but fellow economists dubbed them too breezy and 'journalistic'. That put paid to his chances of ever getting on to the short list for Nobel prize.

In the era of globalisation, it is incumbent on the governments as also central banks, financial institutions, stock exchanges and other economic actors, in general, to reach out to the public about developments in a language that is free of technical jargon. The only way to facilitate meaningful participation by citizens and to benefit from their feedback is to make sure that things are made completely transparent to them and they are fully in the know of the implications of the actions in the corporate, financial, banking and business domains.

### IMF STUDY OF ECB'S LUCIDITY

From this perspective, the pronouncements of many of the institutions such as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and finance ministry officials about the state of the economy in any given context leaves much to be

desired. They use a number of obtuse phrases which must be Greek and Latin to the common run of the people. One, in fact, wonders whether someone should not undertake a scientific evaluation of lucidity in exposition and advise them on the importance of being intelligible.

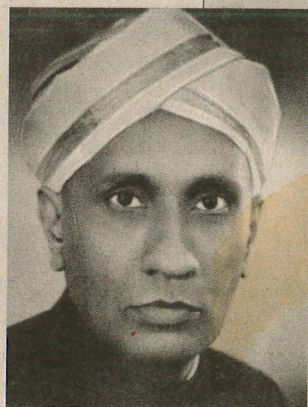
I was happy to notice that the IMF had initiated such a study to measure clarity in communication in the case of the European Central Bank for the period 1999-2007. It has resulted in an interesting paper, titled, *Writing Clearly: ECB's Monetary Policy Communications*, according to which the ECB's written communications are clear in about 95 per cent of instances, which is comparable to, or even better than, other central banks for which a similar analysis is available.

This finding is based on an extensive analysis of ECB's inflation forecasts, inflation targets and verbal descriptions of inflation factors, risk assessments, and the like in monthly bulletins and press statement.

The study further notes that the ECB's monthly bulletin contains useful additional information that enhances the clarity of the contents compared to ECB's press releases. Specifically, the bulletins contain useful detailed information on individual inflation factors and also on the overall forecast risk.

What about a similar study here starting with the RBI?

B. S. RAGHAVAN



**Sir C. V. Raman...**  
Impressive flair.