

NOTE

J C Bose's Annus Mirabilis Ashish Lahiri writes :

1895 has been hailed as Jagadish Chandra Bose's annus mirabilis. Let us have a brief look at his achievements that year as presented in all standard books:

1. Describes his transmitter and receiver at the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, in May 1895.
2. Gives public demonstration at Town Hall, Calcutta, 1895.
3. Publishes paper in *The Electrician*, London, December 1895.
4. His paper is read before Royal Society, London, December, 1895.

Regarding item number 2, i.e., the public demonstration at the Town Hall, this is what he himself wrote about twenty-five years later :

‘Invisible light can easily pass through bricks and houses. Thus it might be possible to send wireless messages through this. I had demonstrated this by showing various experiments at the Town Hall, Calcutta in 1895. Sir William Mackenzie, Lt Governor of Bengal was present there. The electric waves penetrated his huge bulk and two other closed rooms and effected all sorts of disturbance in a third room. They fired an iron shell, exploded a pistol and blew away a heap of gunpowder’.

There appears to be a bit of confusion here as to the details of this demonstration. For one thing, Bengal never had any Lt-Governor named Sir William Mackenzie. However, during the period mentioned by Bose, Sir Alexander Mackenzie was the Lt-Governor of Bengal (1895–1897), who had taken charge only on 18 December 1895. Thus, the said demonstration could only have taken place after that date.

Bose, however, does not give any specific date, not even the month. Nor does one find any mention of the event in the contemporary press during the period 18 December to 31 December 1895. This is highly unusual, given the fact that Lt-Governor Mackenzie himself was present at the occasion.

However, one does find a report in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* on Monday, February 24, 1896 (page number 6, column 2). Under the heading Sir A Mackenzie at the B I Association, the report says:

‘Friday last [i.e., 20 February 1896] witnessed a most gratifying scene, viz, a splendid conversazione at the British Indian Association Rooms, at which His Honour Sir Alexander and Lady Mackenzie together with other high officials of the European Service and members of the Legislative Council were most cordially entertained by the leading members of the Calcutta Native Society.’

The paper goes on to report :

‘Professor J C Bose's electric performances added a most enjoyable air of scientific pastime which was thoroughly liked by all present’.

Therefore, it should be obvious that recollecting many years after the demonstration Bose had confused the details, which is nothing very unusual. The corrected details are :

Date of the Demonstration : 20 February 1896.

Venue : British Indian Association.

VIP's present : Lt-Governor Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Lady Mackenzie.
[The writer is indebted to his friend Tarak Nath Ganguly for fishing out this invaluable piece of evidence.] □