

## Indian science is not short of money

The correspondence about Indian science in *Nature*<sup>1</sup> is today's most burning topic. This decline of Indian science has not been a one-day process but, it has occurred over a considerable period of time, possibly because of some wrong policies by our science-managers. Our Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh deserves kudos for accepting this fact at the Indian Science Congress. It is for the first time in the history of Indian science that the Prime Minister has had the courage to open the doors even for international review. Several issues have marked the downfall of Indian research, particularly in the Government-funded institutes. Some of them were indiscriminate funding towards patenting abroad<sup>2</sup>, brain drain of young and talented scientists because of inadequate absorption policies, extravagant expenditure on duplication of research and procurement of unwanted equipment.

President A. P. J. Abdul Kalam had rightly pointed out that 20% of science budget remained unspent in 2005–06<sup>1</sup>. Many a times a large percentage is spent at the closing of the financial year only for the sake of spending the money.

As far as funding is concerned, India is not far behind in providing money for research and adequate facilities to its scientists. The need of the hour is to properly utilize the available funds and curtail brain drain. But who is going to check the misappropriation of this money and how? If one could see the CAG report of many scientific organizations, it would be found that instruments worth crores are gathering dust. One cannot deny the fact that many a times instruments are purchased for

personal gains rather than for scientific use.

Indian science is plagued by various factors. Besides unethical practices<sup>4,6</sup>, the urge to make illegal money, misuse of power, enhancing bio-data by frivolous publications and patents are some of the reasons for the decline of Indian science<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, frustration amongst scientists because of faulty promotion policies, victimization for speaking against wrong or corrupt practices in the management, increasing sycophancy are some of the other reasons. Court cases have risen at a galloping speed in the last ten years in scientific organizations because of this victimizing attitude of bosses, and faulty rules and regulations. The problem of brain drain has already been acknowledged by all the scientists holding important positions in the country. The five-point plan by Lavania<sup>5</sup> to revive Indian science needs expansion. According to him, the following areas need urgent attention: (i) overhauling of university infrastructure; (ii) synergy and collaboration among national institutes without bureaucratic obstacles; (iii) project leaders to be allowed to work with complete freedom; (iv) only mature and accomplished scientists to be awarded leadership role, and (v) statutory model code for scientific values and ethics. It would be better if Lavania comes out with more practical suggestions on these issues which could be adopted by the policy makers straightaway to revamp the system. We (the country) have already lost so much time.

There are many fora like CVC<sup>7</sup>, CIC, where one can always report against corrupt

practices. The Right to Information Act 2005 has been provided as an efficient tool in the hands of the common man to effectively check corruption<sup>8</sup>. There is no doubt that the scientific community has started taking these issues seriously and seminars and lectures are being organized to highlight these issues<sup>9</sup>.

Anyone who speaks the truth, points towards corruption, asks for information under RTI Act is labelled anti-management and victimized by all means. It is the responsibility of the Govt and organizational chiefs to identify such persons within the system who are raising their voice against the system, listen to it and analyse it rather than just brushing it aside on the pretext of certain rules or personal whims.

However the good news seems to be that PM is going to take stringent action to protect the interests of Indian scientists and Indian science.

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3. Lavania, U. C., *Nature*, 2006, **442**, 744.
4. Akhila, A., *Curr. Sci.*, 2006, **90**, 143.
5. Lavania, U. C., *Nature*, 2007, **445**, 484.
6. Sen, B. K., *Curr. Sci.*, 2007, **92**, 171–173.
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9. Newsletter, Society for Scientific Values; <http://www.scientificvalues.org/news.html>

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## Science Citation Index data: Two additional reasons against its use for administrative purposes

The fascinating and insightful debate concerning the use and misuse of *Science Citation Index (SCI)* data as an administrative tool<sup>1–6</sup> continues, with the most recent contribution from Rustum Roy<sup>7</sup> warning of considerable dangers associated with the frequently improper use of such data. Roy articulates well many of the major problems associated with the use of *SCI* data, of which I am in full agreement.

However, I would like to mention two aspects that he does not address directly – one pertaining to the questionability of what is actually being measured by the data and the other, bearing on the deleterious effect its use may have on the progress of science.

In 1951, the US National Science Foundation was established to provide support for post-World War II scientific research.

Soon thereafter, there was a proposal that reviewers of scientific proposals for government grant monies should be anonymous; the idea being that anonymity would encourage honesty in evaluation even when those reviewers might be competitors or might have vested interests. The idea of using anonymous reviewers was also rapidly adopted by many editors of scientific journals. (Prior to World War II, when a