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## SCIENCE NEWS

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*[The Indian Science Congress was started nearly Seventy years ago with the basic object of bringing together research workers of the country to discuss their specific problems of research with other experts. But with the enormous increase in the number of research workers and the advancement and specialization in various fields of investigations, the benefit of exchange of ideas is getting corroded. Dr. Raghavendra Rao of CFTRI has given a consolidated account of the thinking of a group of scientists on this matter. We are sure that our readers will have views on this important subject.]*

### SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT INDIAN SCIENCE CONGRESS

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AFTER attending the latest Science Congress Session at Mysore some of us discussed the purpose, structure, organization and utility of holding such heterogeneous scientific gatherings. This led us to conclude that we should enunciate our ideas and start a dispassionate debate on the subject in order to make such a gathering more purposeful and stimulating.

1. What should be the function of the Annual Sessions of the Indian Science Congress? At one time, it used to offer an opportunity for the then not-too-numerous scientists to gather and discuss topics of general scientific interest as well as their scientific work.

At present, it would be best if the Science Congress concerned itself only with general policy discussions of the latest theme topics, the general policies to be followed, the thrust areas and their scope and anticipated effects, the anticipated difficulties, technical as well as socio-economic, which may arise during implementation and how to overcome them. Perhaps the meetings of the British and the American Associations for the Advancement of science could serve as models.

The Science Congress certainly cannot and need not try to fulfil the former role of presenting individual research work since the quantum of knowledge and the increasing number of specialist scientists have made this superfluous and impractical. Yet it still valiantly but vainly tries to do this in the Sectional Meetings and Poster sessions. Many subject areas such as chemistry, spectroscopy, engineering, chemical engineering, biochemistry, physiology, nutrition, food science and technology, microbiology, botany, etc. have their own annual national meetings for discussing their research problems.

2. The coverage of some of the topics at the plenary sessions of the focal theme on 4 January 1982 sounded like some standard reviews in journals, though the participants were undoubtedly experts in their areas. Some reviews were very informative and extensive; except Drs. M. S. Swaminathan, C. N. R. Rao and Arunachalam's exposition none tried to indicate the areas of basic research which needed to be supported or expanded. Our impression was that the participants had not prepared well for the lectures. We would add that these remarks hold good for the keynote addresses or general lectures of the previous years also.

3. In conclusion, we suggest that the Science Congress, during a 3-day Session, could take up the following types of activity in order to make it more purposeful and non-repetitive: (i) It should first discuss each year different aspects of a focal theme of general scientific interest, to highlight the importance of thrust areas, indicate their strategic relevance and also review the most important international advances in the respective and frontier areas. (ii) Sectional or specialised/detailed research reports should be avoided and left to the annual meetings of the respective disciplines. If there are no annual meetings for a particular discipline, the latter should be encouraged to start one. (iii) Formal or informal science education at different levels (primary, secondary and tertiary) and popularization of science to create an awareness of the role of science to be discussed. (iv) Scientific and popular scientific publications and their problems should also be actively discussed as they have serious financial and managerial problems.