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**CORRESPONDENCE**

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**Science and audit**

Since the objective of the editor of *Current Science* is to bring about better understanding between scientists and auditors, I thought fit to respond to the article 'Are scientists profligate?' (*Curr. Sci.*, 58, 673). It must be clarified that audit of scientific departments has been unified and undertaken in a systematic manner since April 1986. Earlier, departments like Atomic Energy (DAE) and Space (DOS) were protected from public glare for the reason that new technologies needed to take root and scientific advancement was more important than audit objections. More than 35 years have elapsed in the case of DAE and about 15 years in the case of DOS and so these have been subjected to audit now.

In a democracy, it is axiomatic that a constitutional authority should audit governmental activities funded with public money. The people have delegated the responsibility to this authority in good faith.

The author of the article seems to be confused between a single scientist and a department. He has also not discriminated between smaller institutions and monoliths like DAE. It is my conviction that scientists are doing their best, but when a few of them try to build empires all the ills of a big organization creep in.

When we are talking about delays, we are not talking about delays of one year or so. The audit reports highlight delays of 10–15 years in the case of atomic power plants and delays of up to 9 years in

installing imported equipment in about 90 cases in various CSIR laboratories. The latest audit report has also highlighted a case where land acquired 20 years ago has not been put to use in Maharashtra. These few examples should show that it is not small delays or stray cases that attract audit comment.

Autonomy is not anathema to audit. In fact it is for the executives and scientist-administrators to decide what form of organization they need to further scientific achievements. Unless scientists themselves redraft the rules to make them helpful to the progress of science they will not be able to get out of the present quagmire. Pray, why has not CSIR done this in the last 50 years?

The author has mentioned that he would welcome performance audit by peers. Performance audit is done with reference to benchmarks indicated by the scientists themselves in their project reports etc. When failures and shortfalls of serious magnitude are brought out they do not analyse the reasons and take corrective action. We live in an age of multi-disciplinary approaches, which should be true even for research programmes. Scientists can extend the idea and include auditors in performance evaluation and avoid the dangers of inbreeding.

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