
EDITORIAL

RESPONSES TO THE ARTICLE ON SAC-PM

The article entitled 'Science Advisory Council to the Prime Minister—a brief overview' by Dr P. J. Lavakare (*Current Science*, 58, 777) has evoked many responses from our readers, justifying our optimism that scientific issues would provoke debate among scientists.

Many congratulated *Current Science* for publishing the article. We cannot take credit for this and have only to thank Dr Lavakare and the Chairman of SAC-PM for deciding to inform the scientific community through *Current Science*. To reproduce all the written and oral comments we received would be difficult and may even be repetitive. Instead, as samples we publish two letters, one, which made us sit back and think, from a teacher of English in a school, and another from a scientist (see p. 1000). We summarize below most of the comments we received.

- i) Dr Lavakare deserves much praise for writing a fair and factual article soberly describing SAC-PM and its activities without any attempt to paint them in glowing colours.
- ii) SAC-PM must be complimented on the manner in which it has proceeded to tackle the problems of science in India.
- iii) SAC-PM is also to be congratulated on the considerable amount of work it has done, the number of recommendations it has made and the technical reports it commissioned and received. These reports should, if possible, be made available to a larger scientific public through journals (like *Current Science*) and feedback obtained from 'bench-level' scientists.
- iv) A term of reference of SAC-PM (as given in the DST annual report) seems to have been overlooked—that it has to look into the problems of the Science Departments. If this is true, why are the budgets and activities of Space, Atomic Energy and Defence treated as sacred cows and not discussed? Nor have some of the important problems of some of the Science Departments been taken up.
- v) Similarly, why has not the effectiveness (or otherwise) of autonomous Councils like CSIR, ICAR, etc. and their laboratories been a subject of study?
- vi) It is unfortunate that no action has been initiated and recommendations made to stop the impoverishment of universities and to put them on new tracks for rejuvenation. This lacuna [according to some] is due to the fact that none of the members is really from a university [clearly these correspondents do not consider the Indian Institute of Science as a university in the strictest sense of the term!].
- vii) The members of SAC-PM are obviously very good scientists who will uphold the type of science they are familiar with. But can the type of science they do be considered to be synonymous with the science that may be necessary, at least immediately, to improve the lot of the majority of our population, which is mostly in rural India and below the poverty line?
- viii) The members of SAC-PM, judged from their public statements, subscribe to paradigms that became obsolete three decades ago. The Council does not have any theoretician in science policy (say like Weinberg) or a person who can perceive the philosophical and economic implications of science to a country like ours, where the majority of the population are in villages and pursue agriculture.

If this editorial summary is quoted out of context, one may get the feeling that most of the responses have been critical of SAC-PM. This is not true. The majority of the comments are extremely complimentary to SAC-PM, to Dr Lavakare and to *Current Science*.

Finally *Current Science* is asked to be wary of slowly becoming a mouthpiece of government and its machinery. With the warning is the hope that the editor will be able to withstand all external pressures and keep the journal 'non-aligned'. We shall of course do all we can to keep it that way.