

CORRESPONDENCE

Young scientists scheme

Umesh R. Desai deserves to be congratulated for his thought-provoking observations and excellent suggestions on the Young scientists (YS) scheme of the Department of Science and Technology (*Curr. Sci.*, 1995, **69**, 893–894). I must at the outset agree with Desai about the rather disappointing delay in the processing of YS proposals. In my own case, for example, more than two years elapsed between the initial application for funding and the receipt of first instalment of funds (=commencement of the project). As a result, the project was initiated and completed

when I was not so young according to the YS scheme criteria (below 35 years).

On the other hand, the YS project was of immense help to me in initiating studies which have now given us a new direction in our research endeavours. Also worth mentioning are the Group Monitoring Workshops which really are brain-storming sessions held regularly to assess the progress of work of each of the projects. These are conducted in a most serious manner and younger scientists usually benefit from the constructive criticism offered by the experts panel. I am sure the YS scheme, over the past few years, has been instrumental in giving a tremendous boost to the confidence of young researchers, espe-

cially those desirous of working in areas not necessarily widely pursued in India.

Implementation of the suggestions made by Desai will however, make the DST-YS scheme more effective and 'Young-scientists friendly'. The suggestion of involving 'previous young scientists' in handling the proposals is interesting and may prove to be beneficial although I do not understand the propriety of limiting this only to younger investigators at certain premier institutions.

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Crisis in Indian science

In his incisive article on the cultural crisis of Indian scientific community (*Curr. Sci.*, 1995, **69**, 802–808), A. N. Mitra has put his finger on the pulse of Indian science and has made a correct diagnosis of its maladies. But, unfortunately, he has not suggested any remedial measures for ameliorating the ailment.

Mitra has rightly pointed out that the policy of pampering the national scientific laboratories at the cost of the universities is the root cause of the present bad situation. It has reduced the prestige of the universities by starving them of funds and proper manpower required for their legitimate role of generating new ideas. In the developed countries, fundamental research is carried out in the universities and the laboratories attached to them by drawing upon the fresh young minds which enter their portals. This is clear from the fact that most Nobel Laureates adorn the chairs in the universities. Also, the technological advance in the developed countries mostly occurs in the laboratories run by the industries which are its immediate beneficiaries. On the other hand, in

India the national laboratories have taken over the job of producing Ph Ds which is the normal activity of the universities. And in doing so they have completely neglected their principal role of serving as the storehouse of technical knowledge. Consequently, they have been failures as promoters of technical upsurge in the country. And just like the public sector undertakings they are plagued by overstaffing and trade union activities. In my opinion, the solution for both lies in the concept of liberalization which is being carried out in a half-hearted manner at present.

Let me elaborate on this theme. It is perfectly all right to have a central authority to carry out mission-oriented activities like the use of atomic energy, utilization of space probes and modernization of defence. It is also proper to have service-oriented central organizations like the Survey of India and Meteorological department. But most of the national laboratories run by CSIR and DST do not fall into this category. So they should be privatized and handed over to the respective industries. And a few which are engaged in fundamental research should be attached to the universities. This will release the large amount of funds locked up in the budg-

ets of these institutions for use in the upgradation of the universities.

Of course the universities are also suffering from political interference. The concept of university autonomy has almost evaporated by the political roles played by the chief ministers and the governors in appointing Vice Chancellors. Perhaps the time has come to assign this work to an independent public service commission. Secondly the appointments of the university teachers are in turn vitiated by various pulls and pushes. This will have to be corrected by some kind of a university service. Since education is both a central and a state subject, one would need a Central Education Service for the universities administered by the central government and a State Education Service in each state for the universities in that state.

It is obvious that these are radical departures from the present dispensation which might not be palatable to many scientists as well as politicians.

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