

# CURRENT SCIENCE

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## CORRESPONDENCE

### Funding research projects: We need to be wiser

It is time that the government agencies reconsider their policy regarding funding research projects in different universities and institutes. The agencies should consider not only the quality of the proposed research plan and the infrastructure available, but also the academic environment of the respective university/institute where the work would be carried out. Even if the proposed plan is significant and the person concerned is competent enough to carry it out, if the academic environment of that particular institution is not healthy enough, the proposed plan is almost bound to yield no result, and so is unworthy of funding. Also, the evaluation of the progress of the work should be more critical, considering the output of the previous work which can be judged only from the quality of the publications, and *not* by the number of publications.

For example Banaras Hindu University, a premier academic institute of the country, is also home to many non-academic elements who have their own political ambition, in pursuit of which they create all kinds of problems every year. The net result is, we lose precious time. Undergraduate/post-graduate students suffer because they are frequently called out of classes by these undesir-

able elements and their followers. Research suffers, because one just fears working under such conditions and gradually motivation diminishes. Even though the University administration has its own force of proctors, they are utterly helpless under these circumstances. Every second or third year there is *sine die* closure for an indefinite period. The University administration seems absolutely unwise in tackling these situations (and it may be helpless too). When there is a severe problem, even though the Administration knows the key figures behind it, it fails to take action against them. Instead, it adopts a rather easier (but suicidal!) way to *solve* it; it declares indefinite closure. And the closure can go for months! Undergraduate/postgraduate students are then forced to take their exams without covering the syllabus. And sometime, like the *sine die* closure of 1997, the administration can even be more imprudent. It feels that perhaps the easiest way of solving these problems is to close the research activities for an absurd length of time. It is true as daylight that behind many of the disturbances in BHU, invariably a number of research students are found to be involved. But the University administration cannot take individual action against them,

because they receive backing from political parties. So the easy way is, to condemn hundreds of researchers!

Since the University administration feels that research activities can be stopped for any length of time, the question can rightly be raised as to why funding agencies should support research projects in such institutions? The question should be even more relevant to the UGC, as many of the departments in this particular university are regarded as Centres of Advanced Study and thus they receive substantial grants from the UGC. The UGC as well as other funding bodies should not fund an institution where the very basic requirement for research, an academic environment, is at stake. I do not say that the country should stop its research activities, but certainly it should do so in places proved to be unworthy of support. We are not only wasting public money, but are also condoning a Himalayan wastage of intellect. And this crime should continue no further.

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