

knowledge of a teacher must be updated. However, I fully agree with H. S. Virk (*Curr. Sci.*, 2001, **80**, 1477) that academic staff colleges started by the UGC for teachers' training have failed to serve the purpose and should be abolished. In fact, the requirement of attending orientation programmes and refresher courses for promotion under the Career Advancement Scheme has a negative impact, as the academic activity of the institution is

hampered by the absence of competent teachers attending these courses with no or little gain. Instead, the UGC should conduct national level examinations in the pattern of NET for in-service teachers to be eligible for promotion. Besides, the assessment of teachers by students should be introduced.

Last, but not the least, steps need be taken to formulate a policy for recognizing the contribution of teachers in sci-

ence education by conferring awards, being elected as teacher-fellows to the various academies, and other distinctions.

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## Ailing Indian science and academic leadership

The following views are in response to the correspondence by D. K. Basa (*Curr. Sci.*, 2001, **80**, 1364).

He is correct to infer that Indian science is not at all doing well. There are many reasons for the falling standard of science and technology: meagre allocation of funds, appointment of administrators/Vice-Chancellors (VCs), role of state governments and lastly the role of Chancellors. It is true that our contribution in the world of science is not adequate. The type of researches done in this country is not need-based and is mostly copied or duplicated, rather recirculated. We need to take a very strong view about the quality of researches. The above-mentioned letter also deals with the appointment of VCs and administrators of academic institutions. Appointment to these posts is often controversial.

In the history of our university, since 1946 we have had twenty-nine VCs with twenty-two in the last three decades. VCs are appointed either from the police or

administrative cadre. They may even be politicians (mostly defeated ones); very few of them are from the academic field. Such appointments of VCs (other than academicians) are not good, since the job of VCs has undergone a sea change. In olden days, the VCs used to have academic and financial freedom. Hence they had more time to devote to their campuses, to understand the problems of their students and faculty, to interact with the institutions of excellence at national and international levels, and to have more discussions with the University Grants Commission (UGC). Nowadays, the administrators/VCs are busy in the state capitals for more funds or to have good relations with the political bosses. It has been observed in many cases that the VCs plead before the political administration even for funds for salary, every month. If, in a specific state the government and the Governor are from different political parties, then the matter is still worse.

We should not think that the situation in campuses cannot improve. The state of the universities can be improved, if we are serious about the problem. Here are some suggestions, which can help in better management, academically and financially.

- (a) Education should be the subject of the centre.
- (b) The administrators/VCs should be only from the academic stream.
- (c) There should be no local political interference; only the Governors and the President of India should be in touch with the campuses.
- (d) The UGC should be given more academic powers.
- (e) No new university/institution should be opened, at least for the next five years.

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## Indian politeness is a dressing gown for dishonesty

It was interesting to read the editorial entitled 'The importance of being impolite' (*Curr. Sci.*, 2001, **80**, 1245–1246). The editorial started with a quote of J. B. S. Haldane;

'I have already come to one conclusion as to why science in India is developing with disappointing slowness. It is not

because Indians are stupid or lazy. It is because they are too polite.'

The exact date of this quote is not known. However, I strongly feel that Haldane's observation of being polite is not at all true and applicable to the science and engineering community in India today. It is well known that politeness is

a human virtue and it should never be sacrificed in any situation and at any cost whatsoever. The irony is that soon after independence, politeness became a dressing gown of dishonesty and is being used by people in all spheres of public life. This is the sole reason that even after more than fifty years of independence, the nation is lagging behind as far as

scientific developments are concerned. One must hasten to qualify this statement by stating that in the task of developing and contributing to scientific growth, one has to dig deep with full devotion, for making any discovery. On this front, the country is roused with almost an incurable disease of non-academic and corrupt practices at various stages of administration. As a result, the huge complex of teaching and research organizations in the country is facing almost similar problems. The academic atmosphere in the country has died; schools, colleges, state and central universities have become shopping centres for degrees. Politicians and administrative channels are using the system for their benefit.

The meritorious younger generation has stopped talking about science. Qualified science teachers and university faculty are missing. Vacant positions are being filled with kith and kin of VIPs in political and administrative positions. Promotions are time-bound. Therefore, there is no incentive left for learning after entering the teaching and research profession. Experts, who tend to encounter

prevalent practices of substandard appointments are not called again as experts for selection committees in most of the institutions. Honesty along with politeness is no longer a virtue of members of selection committees. Since teaching and research jobs at universities are down in the priority list of the brilliant younger generation, it is left open for mediocre people. This practice is prevalent even at top levels in scientific organizations, where academic dwarfs manage and earn national and international positions and honours by misusing national funds and facilities.

Saving India from such a looming disaster is one of the greatest intrinsic concerns of the country at large. But most people feel helpless and are scared of the gigantic problem. Industrialists and Indian settlers abroad have posed this scientific and technological problem and prompted a need for its immediate solution. Naturally they may have their own interests. One argues in favour of an open debate on this issue. Honouring merit of students irrespective of caste, creed and financial back-up should be the issue of top priority. The government and private

organizations should devise methods following what is prevalent in USA, Germany and France. This is the only way to help Indian universities and institutes to become compatible with top American and European institutions. For rejuvenating scientific tenor in the country and recognizing merit of students and attracting top talent to teaching and research profession, the teaching faculty should be given top priority and negotiable salary. Such practices have been already started by business concerns. Development of such a system will certainly be opposed by many of those who have learnt to use the existing system for their own benefit. This step may need launching of a new series of universities and technological institutes on par with Harvard, Stanford, MIT, Cal-Tech, etc. Needless to mention that most of these institutions are privately managed and enjoy topmost international reputation.

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## NEWS

### India strikes gold!

In the recently concluded 33rd International Chemistry Olympiad held in Mumbai during 6–15 July 2001, the India team won one gold (Soubhagya Sahoo) and three silver medals (Vivek Kumar, Avinash L. Varna and Aditya Banerjee). India ranked seventh in the world. There were a total of 210 participants from 54 countries. This is a remarkable achievement for a country in its third year of entry into the Chemistry Olympiad. A training camp for the students was organized in Wilson College under the stewardship of D. V. Prabhu.

India has been doing very well in the Physics and Mathematics Olympiads in the last several years. This year, in the Physics Olympiad held in Antalya, Turkey, Nandan Dixit, Parag Agarwal and Arvind Thyagarajan won gold medals and Naresh Satyan and S. Vijay Kumar won silver, putting India fourth in the world. In the Maths Olympiad held in Washington DC, USA, Abhay Kumar Jha and Sucharit Sarkar won gold, Abhishek Saha and Samir Basu won silver and

Swarnendu Datta and Nikhil A. Savale won bronze medals.

In the Biology Olympiad held in Brussels, Belgium, P. S. Ahluwalia struck gold, while Shikhan Agarwal, Nilesh Chandra and Namrata Vijayvergia had to settle for silver. The Olympiad movement is gaining momentum in the country. The Physics, Chemistry and Biology Olympiad programmes are coordinated by Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education (HBCSE), Mumbai in collaboration with the Indian Association of Physics Teachers. The Mathematics Olympiad Cell of the National Board of Higher Mathematics coordinates the maths programme.

The announcement calling for applications for participation appears in leading newspapers in the month of September/October. A screening test is conducted in different centres in November/December. A more rigorous test for the selected candidates is held in January/February and about 30–35 candidates are selected for participation in the training camp held at HBCSE in the month of May/June

every year. At the end of the camp, based on their performance, 6, 5, 4 and 4 students are selected for participation in the International Maths/Physics/Chemistry/Biology Olympiads, respectively, held in different parts of the world.

Invariably, Chinese and Iranian students are among the toppers in the Olympiads. They seem to receive considerable support from their respective governments. The Indian students who make it to the International Olympiads receive a scholarship at the rate of Rs 3000 per month through the KVYP scheme, provided they pursue their higher education in science subjects.

For more details, the reader may visit the website [www.hbcse.tifr.res.in](http://www.hbcse.tifr.res.in) or write to Arvind Kumar, Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education, V.N. Purav Marg, Mankhurd, Mumbai 400 088.

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