

The AcSIR Bill gets a nod

The Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India introduced and passed the Academy of Scientific and Innovative Research (AcSIR) Bill, 2010 in the Lok Sabha on 5 September 2011. The Bill was introduced with the objective to establish an Academy for furtherance of the advancement of learning and prosecution of research in the field of science and technology (S&T) in association with the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and to declare the institution known as the Academy of Scientific and Innovative Research, to be one of national importance to provide for its incorporation and matters connected therewith or incidental thereto¹.

The objects of the Academy are to disseminate advanced knowledge in S&T by providing teaching and research facilities in such branches of learning as it may deem fit, particularly in emerging areas and such areas as may emerge in future; to undertake interdisciplinary studies and research; to conduct courses in, and integrate into its courses, interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary areas covering natural sciences, life sciences, mathematical and computational sciences, medical sciences, engineering, applied arts, humanities, social sciences, law relating to these areas and interfaces thereof; to take appropriate measures for innovations in teaching and learning processes; to create an ambience for learning and scholarship in advanced S&T instead of exclusively focusing on marks or grades; to educate and train manpower in scientific and technological fields; to establish linkages with industries within and outside India for the promotion of S&T; to collaborate, in appropriate areas in the field of S&T, with reputed universities and institutions within or outside India; to promote research in S&T having a bearing on social, economic, cultural, intellectual and academic welfare of the people.

According to this Bill, the Academy shall primarily focus on research and

imparting instruction in such areas which are not ordinarily taught in regular academic universities in India. The curricula, pedagogy and evaluation of the Academy shall be innovative and directed towards creating highest-quality personnel with cross-disciplinary knowledge, aiming to provide leaders in the field of S&T.

The relation of these academies with CSIR is properly elaborated in the Bill. The Academy shall be, provided, or, allowed to use, the infrastructure and scientific manpower of CSIR for teaching and research purposes for mutual benefit. The Academy, within two weeks of the commencement of this Act, shall, notwithstanding anything contained in any other Act, rules, regulations or by-laws for the time being in force, enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with CSIR, for the purposes of its affiliation with the Academy for the purposes of academics, teaching and award of degrees or diplomas and the persons pursuing the studies in the Council for award of any degree or diploma, after entering of such MoU, be awarded degrees or diplomas by the said Academy.

This Bill declared that the AcSIR shall be an institution of national importance. It extends to the whole of India, except Jammu and Kashmir, and will come into force on such date as the Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, appoint, and different dates may be appointed for different provisions of this Act. The Academy shall have the structure of a multi-centric institution based on a hub-and-spoke model. CSIR headquarters located at New Delhi will act as a hub which will be responsible for centralized administration. It will be connected with all the 37 CSIR laboratories (spokes) which will act as actual campuses for different subjects/areas based on their respective specializations.

The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha by the then Minister of State for Science and Technology, Earth Sciences, Prithviraj Chauhan. According to the statement of objects and reasons given

by him, India's leadership in science and engineering in future will, inter alia, depend on its advancement in integrative and inter-disciplinary areas of science and engineering. There is a shortage of institutions which offer PhD courses in the field of integrative and inter-disciplinary areas of science and engineering, and other advanced courses in such areas. Since the mid 1980s, India, whose relative position in respect of PhDs in science and engineering was substantially higher compared to other Asian countries, has declined. Unless India keeps pace with other countries in producing more PhDs in the field of integrative and inter-disciplinary areas of science and engineering, it may lag behind other nations which would adversely affect the pace of economic development in the country.

It is proposed to setup the AcSIR for substantially increasing the number of researchers in integrative and inter-disciplinary areas of science and engineering in a cost-effective manner without requirement of any significant gestation period and additional funds from the Government. The Academy would offer a one-stop solution to meet the above requirement in higher education by leveraging the strengths of CSIR comprising around 4500 scientists in diverse branches of science and engineering and utilizing its research and development infrastructure.

Chavan expects that the establishment of the AcSIR would substantially increase research in inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary areas, and would produce from the fifth year onwards 1000 PhDs in S&T and 120 PhDs in engineering every year.

1. The Academy of Scientific and Innovative Research Bill, 2010, Bill No. 73 of 2010.

Jaimini Sarkar (*S. Ramaseshan Fellow*).
e-mail: jaimini_dhane@hotmail.com