

projects from unemployed young scientists are considered and if approved, the young scientist can even draw his/her salary from the project funds.

– The suggestion that young scientists be allowed to present their project before the review committee is impractical as the committee has to consider a number of projects and other policy items. Moreover, the projects are placed before the committee along with comments from experts.

The Department is concerned that the

processing time for projects from young scientists should be reduced as much as possible. It is important that quick decisions be taken and communicated to young scientists, at an early stage of their career. This ensures that their enthusiasm for taking up research is not lost and they do not decide to leave science and take up other jobs or leave the country altogether. It is our constant endeavour to achieve this and decisions on a majority of projects are communicated within 3–4 months. This period appears very reasonable particularly when one con-

siders that there are over 500 projects from young scientists in different stages of consideration/implementation/review at any point of time. However, the present project-processing procedure is followed in order to ensure quality.

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Coping with liberalization

I am rather concerned about the tone of your editorial 'Coping with liberalization' (*Curr. Sci.*, 1996, 70, 5–6). Are there pressures building on you not to voice such open debates on issues which to my mind demonstrate a scientific attitude towards Indian science? After being a common scientist for several years, I worked as a science administrator for about two decades during a period when Indian science was getting organized. In this process of getting organized, several scientists had become science planners and science administrators and had committed themselves to the new role of promoting science and technology for national development. There were many amongst us who fought for the cause of science and made a case to the Government for enhancing support to this activity. In this process there were several critical reviews carried out by strengthening our peer review system, monitoring mechanisms introduced asking for accountability from scientists who had been given funds for specific projects and programs. No doubt even at that time questions were being asked of us science administrators as to whether we had the experience to take such decisions and whether such reviewing activities should not be left to active scientists alone. I believe that organizations like the Department of Science and Technology play a very important role in giving a sense of objectivity to the process of funding

science. In all these efforts openness, transparency, and to a certain extent accountability, were always highlighted. In my view this approach of DST did help in bringing back the credibility of scientific activity in the country. I would, therefore, urge *Current Science* to continue this objective quest for the current status of science in India.

I have always admired the new direction that *Current Science* has taken and not having an easy access to *Nature*, I have always looked at *Current Science* to educate myself on various issues of national concern involving science and technology in the country. If *Nature* can voice such policy debates simultaneously with publishing new results of interest to the scientific community, I wonder why *Current Science* cannot debate issues on the current status of science in India. Has the world scientific community criticized *Nature* for digressing from its appeal to working scientists? Are there not enough heads of scientific institutions and agencies who have not only to support science in their institutions but also to seek funds to justify their activities to Government and public at large? In my view the objective debates currently going on in your journal without personal vendetta would definitely help in educating our scientists and science administrators about the true status of science in India. I hope you will continue to air such views in your editorials and also publish selected

articles relating to new research findings, review articles and book reviews.

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Your editorial 'Coping with liberalization' made very interesting reading. Whenever I happen to read about 'Indian science' I find it difficult to think of 'Science' as something divided on the basis of national, and regional boundaries. In that case, there should be a 'Pakistani science', a 'Bangla Deshi science', a 'Sri Lankan science', and also possibly a 'Maldivian science'. Further within India there should be a 'Kannada science', a 'Telugu science' and a 'Maharashtrian science'. I think 'Science' is universal and is a truthful search for more knowledge, irrespective of space and time. The correct reference would be 'Science in India'.

Only the practice and management of science changes from place to place, and from time to time. The criticisms which appear in the 'problem sections' of *Current Science* are on the practice and management of science, and not on 'Science' *per se*. In the West, science

policies are criticized more sharply, for long. And that has definitely not damaged 'Science' there. Not only that, it has helped in charting more rational and meaningful directions.

I congratulate *Current Science* for the courageous step taken. In my opinion

this should have happened at least a decade ago. The open expression of opinions and resentment has resulted in a very realistic understanding that 'All is not well with Science in India'. I think this better understanding of reality is worth the effort. In concluding I would

like to say, 'We want more of this liberalization, and definitely not less.'

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Digital library services from public to private sector undertakings

People take special efforts to leave their work and walk to the library. Using a computer, books and periodicals can be brought to the place of work by converting them from print to digital version. Having a digital library at the place of work can increase productivity. CD-ROM technology had made data retrieval much easier. It is possible to isolate the precise information from these discs and transmit it through e-mail from the available networks.

National Informatics Centre (NIC), Delhi, offers a service of providing MEDLARS and patents data. For the past one year I have been interacting with people at NIC via e-mail. Recently, I have opened a deposit account with Central Drug Research Institute (CDRI), Lucknow, for a similar service through e-mail. CDRI offers EMBASE, BIOSIS, biotechnology, chemical and pharmaceutical abstracts.

To both these organizations I send a key word – at the generic level – search request via e-mail. For example, my e-mail message would typically request like 'Please send references on aspirin, human, English, from 1993 to 1996'. To the person who reads this at the other end, it would mean that I require all references on aspirin, on studies conducted on humans, published in English language, and between the period from 1993 to present date. The CD-ROM search is conducted and the results are e-mailed back to me in 48 hours. Thus I would get all published literature on aspirin for that period, which satisfies my quantitative dimension of information on aspirin. The objective is to create a comprehensive science & technology (S&T) information resource for my organization in terms of quantity, quality and time.

To meet the qualitative dimension, I add value to the whole data of that particular medicine by way of (a) highlighting, (b) provide codes to each reference – which will be easy for future retrieval, (c) create word index of the whole document, (d) print, bind, and stack the information by medicine- or productwise in the library as a reference volume. People – some elder professionals and managers – who are not very comfortable with the handling of personal computers find referring to these books familiar as any other book in the library. In my organization these bound books are popular as GIST volumes (GIST is a word coined by me to mean Global Information Science & Technology).

On the time dimension the whole process is relatively fast; it is standardized and takes 7 to 10 working days to produce a volume. The corresponding version of the GIST volume is available on the Local Area Network (LAN) environment in about three days at our corporate office. For those who prefer searching data on the computer, they use WordStar package available on LAN.

In addition to NIC & CDRI, people at National Centre for Software Technology (NCST) who have created Bombay Library NETWORK (BONET) and Education & Research NETWORK (ERNET) have been ready with advise, whenever I had impending data transmission problems.

Similar to NIC and CDRI, other government-aided bodies – where e-mail is readily available – could consider negotiating with other database producers in the basic subject areas like agriculture, electronics, engineering, physics, textile, etc.

More important, the initiative and

publicity taken by public sector undertakings can commence a chain of activity like (a) replenish information to S&T in their subject areas of specialization and its outcome when they absorb the new developments and implement in their work, (b) create new jobs to young graduates with their available skills and intelligence, to process the data, (c) information brokers, (d) translators, (e) consultant who can effectively act on it, (f) data base producer, (g) the general growth of S&T information industry at large. Like other commodities in the consumer market, there will be producers, wholesalers, retailers and consumers who can play their respective roles for the development of Indian S&T.

National Information System for Science and Technology (NISSAT)'s efforts in organizing information user-supplier meetings is laudable. These meetings facilitate better empathy and cooperation and promote flow of information between the information-rich and the information-undernourished organizations.

Information should be treated as an important factor for individual and organizational productivity. Till recently we did not have a viable and cost-effective system to regularly procure such desired S&T information at our work place.

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