

## Indian scientists win top UN awards

In a forthright editorial 'An uncertain future' (*Curr. Sci.*, 1997, 72, 5), P. Balaram has painted a realistic scenario of Indian S & T. Even S. K. Joshi in his presidential address of the 1997 session of the Indian Science Congress in Delhi minced no words, when he said in the presence of the Prime Minister that reduction in R&D funding (in India) is a short-sighted policy and would weaken us devastatingly in the long run.

Against this backdrop, a unique hat-trick of global glory comes as a pleasant surprise. More importantly, these international recognitions are considered as good as Nobel prizes.

Specifically, UNEP's Sasakawa Environment Prize for 1996 of US \$ 200,000 has been awarded to T. N. Khoshoo of the New Delhi-based Tata Energy Research Institute, for his outstanding contributions to the protection and management of the environment. For over three decades, Khoshoo has been an advocate of strong regional environmental planning for long-term ecologi-

cal and economic security, particularly in the developing country context (*Our Planet*, 1997, 8, 33).

The prestigious World Food Prize for 1996, also of US \$ 200,000, has been awarded to G. S. Khush of the International Rice Research Institute, Manila, Philippines. World's premier rice breeder, Khush has spearheaded the Institute's programme for developing high yielding, disease and insect resistant varieties of rice. More than 300 improved varieties of rice have been selected and released by national rice improvement programmes from the material developed under the leadership of Khush over the last 29 years. These varieties and their progenies are now planted in about 50% of the world's rice area.

Eminent theoretical astrophysicist J. V. Narlikar, Director of the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics, Pune, and Jiri Grygar of the Academy of Science, Prague, Czech Republic share the UNESCO's Kalinga Prize for popularization of science.

Each year since 1951, UNESCO has conferred the £ 1,000 Kalinga Prize on an individual who had a distinguished career as a writer, editor, lecturer, radio/television programme director or film producer, and has interpreted science, research and technology to the public (*Curr. Sci.*, 1994, 66, 618-620).

All said, these success stories of Indian scientists strongly suggest that given the right support, both financial and otherwise, we can do wonders. As India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru has rightly said, 'It is science alone that can solve the problem of hunger and poverty... The future belongs to science and to those who make friends with science....' It is high time that the government doubled our R & D expenditure to mark the Golden Jubilee of Independence (1947-1997).

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## On the recent editorials

P. Balaram in an editorial (*Curr. Sci.*, 1997, 72, 5) has rightly drawn attention to the declining funding and support for science and higher education in the era of liberalization. Though most of the arguments are balanced and reasonable, the reference to 'herbal petrol fiasco' is made rather naively. It was the immature and unscientific approach adopted by premier science establishments like DST and CSIR which primarily led to the public madness (see, for example, V. Ramamurthy's interview reported in *Nature*, 1996, 383, 112). Readers may find it amusing to read a guest comment by M. Shermer (*Am. J. Phys.*, 1996, 64, 1229-1230) the title of which conveys the essential point 'Hope springs eternal - Why people believe weird things' in the context of public perception of science.

I think the title of Balaram's editorial 'An uncertain future' and implied implications could be viewed differently: Is not an uncertain future challenging, worth enjoying, and full of new possibilities? Perhaps *Current Science* can make a virtue of this uncertain future by vigorously promoting informed debate and criticism of science establishment, and disseminating policy matters to the readership. It is worth cautioning against the pitfalls involved in the proposed thrust outlined in the editorial entitled 'Reaching out to industry' (*Curr. Sci.*, 1997, 72, 97). One must be clear and careful regarding one's role: Why should a scientist be supposed to assume the mantle of an entrepreneur or a graduate physics syllabus be flooded with computer and electronics courses or an engineering graduate seek MBA?

Journals like *Journal of Scientific and Industrial Research* ought to focus on 'developing a new synergism between academic science and technological innovation', and journals established for such specific purposes ought to be strengthened. Regarding industry-academia interaction, more than what is already within the scope of *Current Science* would be inappropriate and a short-sighted approach. Depending on the need and urgency, it would be advisable to launch supplement to *Current Science* specifically for industry.

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