

IITs and other government-sponsored research institutes. This confuses the young minds and influences them to seek research opportunities only in specific institutes. This causes an artificial competition between the said organizations. As a policy, the facilities available to the research students in all these organizations should be uniform and realistic. For example, in IIT Kharagpur, with the academic registration fees spiraling upwards, and the mess bills and maintenance fee ever rising, the students here even have to bear the added burden of paying for every single use of the in-house sophisticated instruments. These conditions are not so serious in other

institutes/organizations. The fallacy is that almost all of these sophisticated instruments have been purchased with assistance/funding from HRD/MHRD/DST/CSIR, etc. and the aim of these funding/grants in these premium institutes is for manpower training. When students instead of getting trained in the operation of these equipment get away by just paying for testing or measurement charges, then the original goal of their purchase itself gets marred and defeated! If this policy remains, then we will soon be left only with a virtually crippled scientific community who would fear the thought of instrument fabrication and we would be slaves to

the multinational instrument industry forever. A big mistake is being done to earn trivial revenue in comparison to the huge investment, only to follow the system of developed countries.

It is high time the policy makers focussed their attention towards the nourishment of experimental research in India and become efficient in the world market.

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## The Indian Science Congress: Kumbh mela or an effective forum for Science & Technology

The rather hesitating final support for continuance of Indian Science Congress sessions by H. S. Virk<sup>1</sup>, after comparing the same with the Kumbh mela does not recognize the unique success attained under the leadership of R. L. Mashelkar by the Pune (2000) Science Congress in (i) projecting in an effective manner the current frontier areas like bioinformatics, information technology, communication, genetic control, patenting problems and societal impact of science, as well as (ii) bringing about a remarkably close interaction between young and mature students of science during the session. These types of unprecedented achievements have been better reflected in a brief note by Rajendra Prabhu<sup>2</sup>.

Started in 1914 on the pattern of the British Association of Science, the ISCA had tended to assume the status and role of a Magh mela of scientists. There has, however, been a distinct improvement since the introduction of the idea of a Focal Theme in 1976 by Swaminathan and the institution of a Task Force at the suggestion of Mehrotra by the DST since 1980, to follow up the recommendations of the focal theme. Unfortunately the functioning of this Task Force is no longer receiving the attention it deserves and requires much more serious effort(s) and sustained follow-up action.

Hopefully, the high standards of scientific discussions involving top leaders and the young learners, set up by the Congress in 2000 would be maintained in forthcoming sessions. Simultaneously, greater attention to well-thought out recommendations emanating from such a huge body of scientists should result, through concerted efforts of the Task Force, in a closer interaction amongst scientists, society and the governmental agencies.

Further, sustained and well-planned efforts for clearer understanding with the print as well as electronic media from well before till after the actual session should be an effective force for creation of scientific temper amongst the general public, scientists and policy makers – a dream with which ISCA was nurtured by persons like Jawaharlal Nehru.

In the above task of popularization of science, the ISCA secretariat under the overall guidance of the President and the Honorary Secretaries should play an active role with steps like: (i) Publication of the autumn (September) issue of *Everyman's Science* with short biographies including photographs of the General and Sectional Presidents (preferably with a brief account of their plan); (ii) Securing brief synopses of invited and special/popular lectures at the general and sectional sessions and distributing them well in time for use by the print as

well as electronic media; (iii) Developing an efficient distribution mechanism of the above materials; (iv) Activizing ISCA Regional Chapters in these directions.

In order to convince that the above suggestions are not merely theoretical, the writer of this note may be excused for citing (with utmost humility) that in his capacity as Assistant Local Secretary of the ISCA session held at Allahabad in January 1949, he could (i) publish the biographies of K. S. Krishnan and others in all the local as well as many national dailies and magazines coupled with (ii) half an hour's broadcast daily in both Hindi/English at the All India Radio immediately after the News. In retrospect, it may be of some amusing interest that in these efforts, the author was motivated primarily to earn sufficient money to repay the loan (which as a teacher with extremely low salary), he had taken for the expenses of preparation and submission of his D Phil thesis in October 1948.

1. Virk, H. S., *Curr. Sci.*, 2000, **78**, 1052.
2. Prabhu, R., *National Herald*, 19 March 2000.

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