

Indian Science Congress

The inaugural session of the 90th Indian Science Congress being held on Jnana Bharathi Campus, Bangalore University, Bangalore, between 3 and 7 January 2003 with the focal theme: Frontier Science and Cutting-Edge Technologies began with the long awaited and much desired S&T Policy-2003. The Prime Minister of India, Atal Behari Vajpayee said he was delighted to launch the Policy-2003 for 'responding to the breathtaking changes in the world of science and technology and to the challenges and opportunities before us in the new century'. He spoke of continued support of his Government to 'embrace science and technology in all its true spirit' with the necessity to make appropriate S&T inputs to achieve the 8% GDP growth rate target envisaged in the Tenth Plan 2002-2007. For solving the many critical challenges facing the country such as meeting healthcare needs, etc. he called for 'greater contributions from Indian science', with intensification of activities in frontier areas of science and technology such as was demonstrated in 'India's capability to launch a satellite into geostationary orbit with our own launch vehicles'. He also stressed the need 'of scientists and scientific institutions to build up a reservoir of human resources and technological infrastructure'.

Vajpayee emphasized the need to candidly recognize and address several problems:

1. The disconnect between science and policy: He appealed to scientists and technologists 'to be proactive in throwing light on policy concerns' and for those in government to pro-actively seek such inputs.
2. Insufficient linkages between R&D establishments and the broader economy: He pointed out the possible reason for this, namely, that industry had little incentive to upgrade its processes during the 'license raj' and scientists viewed applied research and its commercialization as an inferior occupation.
3. Promotion of traditional technologies: This would enrich all the three technologies that operate in India - modern, conventional and traditional.

4. Bureaucratization of the R&D establishments: Vajpayee said 'we have to ensure that our scientific institutions do not become afflicted with the culture of our Governmental agencies. Adding that the main cause leading to frustration among young scientists was, seniority displacing merit and talent suppression.

5. Internal brain-drain: A solution to this was to 'face this issue squarely' by giving promising scientists and technologists the necessary opportunities, recognition, standing, and adequate material compensation.

6. Attracting the Indian Scientific Diaspora: Vajpayee said 'we should devise pragmatic and flexible schemes to enable them to come and work in our S&T institutions'.

7. On science education: Vajpayee spoke of a disturbing trend. 'We have several exceptional scientific and technological institutions, some others turn out graduates and post-graduates, even doctorates, of indifferent quality. We need to reflect on this and take corrective action'. Finally, he said that for building a self-confident India there was need for pursuit of excellence and that achievements in science and technology, like in sports, are a source of national pride.

Murli Manohar Joshi, Minister of Science and Technology, HRD and Ocean Development, while making the first public announcement of the S&T Policy-2003 said that 'we could be justly proud of the strong S&T infrastructure'. He further added the Scientific Policy Resolution of 1958 and the Technology Policy Statement of 1983 'needed to be revisited' and that the scientific community had been 'urging for such a review'. He said the earlier model and notions of science were based on the 'dichotomy between science and society', this distancing had given rise to an inability to 'make any meaningful impact on problems of mass poverty, etc.' Adding that 'for science and technology to grow, it must be green, it must be ethical, it must have a human face, it must be gender sensitive, it must be region and context-specific, reflect our enormous diversity' and 'science must touch every facet of national life'. A cornerstone of the new

policy would be the integrated management of sustainable development and instead of treating science as distinct from technology, 'we now treat both as being inter-related, inter-dependent and harmonized'. Some questions scientists must ask themselves in development of cutting edge technologies were those regarding benefit to the deprived, contribution to environment regeneration, empowering civil society and minimizing waste and energy consumption. If the answer was yes to all these, only then 'must we put all our resources to developing them' with the societal dimension paramount which would provide 'our science and technology initiatives, uniqueness of character and confer on us a leadership status'. Joshi stressed that a policy can 'only outline our vision and philosophy, set directions and suggest an approach to implementation and the task of converting the policy to action 'belongs to all of you'.

The institution of an 'India Science Award' was announced. This award would carry a cash award of Rs 25 lakhs to be given every year and the Indian Science Congress Association would work out the modalities on the details of the award.

K. Kasturirangan, General President, Indian Science Congress Association, emphasized that for 'ensuring optimal use of our resources' the institutional framework should create an environment for dynamic assessment and appraisal. Periodic reviews on the issue of progress, achievements and criticalities and decisions with respect to phasing out activities that outlived their relevance are needed. The moment had arrived, he said, to firmly establish India as a global R&D platform and strengthen symbiotic links between industries and R&D system on scales which are unprecedented.

In addition to the presentation of the Indian Science Congress Awards at the inaugural session, releases made included 'University Meet Proceedings', 'Frontier Science and Cutting-Edge Technologies: Vision Document', 'Biodiversity Atlas and Database of India' and 'Shaping of Indian Science' compendium.

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