# How do we promote scientific research as a career in India?

I fully support the viewpoint and appreciate the bold suggestions made by P. J. Lavakare[1] in his write-up on science and technology (S&T) policy documents. We badly need another Bhabha and Nehru again to promote S&T in India, since we neither have scientists like Bhabha who can overrule the bureaucrats nor do we have politicians with the vision of Nehru. Hence our poor performance in the field of S&T.

I also agree with Bhattacharjee[2] that we scientists have failed to inspire our own students and children to take up science as a career. But he has failed to make any valuable suggestion in his write-up, which can make a visible dent in the sorry state of affairs in India.

While welcoming the suggestions of Lavakare[1], let me point out some glaring disparities in the recruitment system and suggestions to improve it:

(a) A NET-qualified research scholar is paid only half the salary of a college or a university lecturer, even when he holds a higher position in the merit list. I fail to understand this discrimination between NET-qualified research scholars and lecturers in the matter of pay scales and status. This simply means exploitation of the meritorious in India!

(b) A fresh MBA or MCA graduate gets four to five times higher pay packet in a multinational or a private firm than a NET-qualified research scientist in a university or in a scientific establishment.

(c) After completion of Ph D, there is absolutely no guarantee of a job. Then why should one take such a risk of choosing a research career?

(d) All NET-qualified students must be given IAS pay scales, security of service after Ph D, and other perks offered by private firms, if we want to stop the declining research interest of the younger generation.

(e) There should be a scientific pool of NET-qualified Ph Ds, and all universities and science laboratories should make recruitments only out of this pool through a central agency on the pattern of UPSC.

The Department of Science and Technology, Government of India should take immediate steps to check the rot. Unless, we bring some revolutionary changes in the recruitment policy of scientists in India, the future of science is bleak and it will prove to be disastrous for India.

1. Lavakare, P. J., *Curr. Sci.*, 2002, **82**, 613–614.
2. Bhattacharjee, S. K., *ibid*, 2002, **82**, 613.

H. S. VIRK

*Department of Physics,*
*Guru Nanak Dev University,*
*Amritsar 143 005, India*
*e-mail: virkhs@yahoo.com*

# Allocation of space and facilities to young researchers

The excellent editorial 'Retirements and extensions' (*Curr. Sci.*, 2002, **82**, 773–774) covers all important issues, except that it fails to reflect the views of the younger researchers down the line, who are the ones directly affected by the policy changes, ad-hoc extensions, and re-employment. Normally, one knows the date of retirement at the time of joining the service. I recall several instances when the aspirant(s) for the top position, and others down the ladder, were not happy with the decision to extend the services of the 'top boss'. After the age of fifty, individuals approximately know where they would be reaching before retirement, barring windfalls, which come when the senior(s) are selected for positions in other organizations. The last pay commission extended the retirement age on selective basis. This affected the individuals at lower positions in the hierarchy, as they were deprived of the higher post or their term at the coveted position was shortened.

The other area where the juniors are affected is the laboratory and office space. In most research institutions and university departments, the youngsters in the age group of 30–40, if they are lucky enough to get a regular job (and not a project position that co-terminates with the project) do not have adequate laboratory and office space. The retirees hang round the departments, often not vacating their former laboratories, offices and perks like telephone. In the Indian context, the career of young independent researchers to a great extent depends on the square metre of the laboratory area he/she can use, without stepping on other toes. The laboratory space determines the equipment they can obtain through institutional or external funds, students they can accept, and the goals they can set for themselves. In many places funds are not the constraint, but the laboratory space, is. In biological sciences, quality (impact factor) and the number of publications depend on the available laboratory space, post-docs, students and technicians that can be accommodated in the area. Those, in the critical age group mentioned earlier, who happen to inherit large laboratory space along with the supporting staff on the retirement of their senior, are able to grow and get peer recognition, while others, though intellectually better endowed, lag behind because of the space constraints. How can one emerge as a team leader if there is no place to house the team? A large laboratory inherited at the age of 50 and beyond following retirement of a senior, is too late in life. It can be argued that the 'management' should rectify such anomalies. However, re-allocation of space, telephones, and official vehicles are always highly sensitive, and emotive issues in all organizations in absence of standard norms.

Being a retiree myself, I am for all possible support to senior citizens, but the younger colleagues should have the priority in allocation of space and facilities. All academic institutions should have a clearly defined written policy regarding the retirees, leaving no ambiguities that could be interpreted either way by the 'management'. Many a times emeritus scientists are approved by the Director, but their daily needs are to be met by the resources at the disposal of Divisional or Sectional Head where they are attached. After official retirement, scientists should gracefully leave their laboratories, and move to new locations where their knowledge and experience is equally useful.

C. R. BHATIA

*17 Rohini, Plot 29–30,*
*Sector 9-A, Vashi,*
*New Mumbai 400 703, India*
*e-mail: neil@bom7.vsnl.net.in*