

Infrastructure in S&T in India

The woeful state of the infrastructure in Science and Technology in India is well acknowledged. Some years ago UGC came forward with an imaginative scheme called COSIST for strengthening Infrastructure in University Science Departments. Funds in the range of Rs 50 lakhs were given to selected Departments and kept several of these departments in animation. This scheme has worked reasonably well. It is understood that following the recommendation of the Scientific Advisory Committee to the Cabinet a similar scheme will soon be implemented. With the acronym FIST (Funds for

Infrastructure in Science and Technology), DST has called for proposals from across the nation.

Naturally the call has been received with great enthusiasm. Some concerns are that the funds earmarked for this purpose are apparently in the region of Rs 20 crores. When one considers that the number of universities and the number of eligible Departments in them, we may have 1000 contenders. Even if we grant that only 5% of them have a past track record and future potential, the amount is too small. Enormous expectations have been aroused by the DST call for proposals.

If FIST is not adequately funded and implemented, this welcome initiative may prove counterproductive for the growth of Indian science.

FIST represents a fantastic opportunity to inject modern research facilities into the Indian University science. If the strategic sector – DAE, DRDO, ISRO –

will come forward and pledge Rs 20 crores each and perhaps have their representatives involved in the selection but route funds through DST, then a wonderful window will be open. Indeed the AICTE Committee headed by P. Rama Rao has recommended

precisely such possibilities for reshaping post graduate engineering education and research.

Is any one listening?

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