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## CORRESPONDENCE

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### Science and audit

First I should like to congratulate the Editor for taking an innovative step by opening a page for discussion of issues that affect the doing of science *satisfactorily* and *effectively*. The financial aspects of supporting science (*Curr. Sci.*, 58, 673) are one such issue; and given the present disposition of finance departments *vis-à-vis* scientists, it is only natural that much heat is generated when such issues are discussed. But what we need is the generation of light.

While Satyamurthy's statements may injure the feelings of some scientists, Venkataraman's over-protective reaction does not provide any soothing effect. We must therefore objectively analyse the major statements of Satyamurthy.

Satyamurthy says that huge sums of money are being spent now, compared to some twenty years ago, on science and technology. In absolute numbers, yes; but are we really spending huge amounts considering the declining purchasing power of the rupee, the tremendous growth in population, etc.? If we are truly committed to the goal of realizing social transformation and better living conditions through science and technology, then no amount is too big and no return is too insignificant. There is some truth in the statements made by Satyamurthy. For example, there is proliferation (to almost undesirable levels in some cases) in the cultivation of science and technology, like in many other fields. There is also lack of co-ordination among the various science and related departments of our government. In this, and in many other areas of science cultivation, the academies of science have a role cut out for them. But the point is: are they willing to shoulder the responsibility? I do not think scientists in India are profligate, as Satyamurthy would like the public to believe. On the contrary, the scientific community has, by and large, not been able to imbibe from other sectors of society the dubious virtue of being profligate. I can agree with Satyamurthy if he modifies his statement to say that there is lack of commitment to use monies effectively by some scientists or scientific organizations; but I cannot agree when he says that money is no problem for science. It is a big problem, especially for conscientious scientists who are not 'operators'. See the way our university-based scientists are

languishing. Satyamurthy refers to the give-money-and-do-not-ask-questions syndrome among scientists. I do not think there is even a grain of truth in this statement. The finance departments must learn to ask pertinent questions and not those of the harassing type. We only hear about *audit objection*. Why can't we hear about *audit co-operation* or *audit assistance*?

The finance departments must cultivate the habit of functioning as referees or reviewers (like those existing for judging scientific papers for publication in a journal) rather than as hangmen. This attitude will help foster the much-needed endearing environment between the scientific and financial communities, even if the latter wish to have the so-called *control* called *audit*. The referee of a scientific paper takes pains to offer such criticism that would make the paper acceptable for publication; similarly auditors can and should offer constructive criticisms rather than funnel out audit objections.

I think in all fairness to Satyamurthy he should be invited, at some stage after scientists have expressed their views on this subject, to have his say in these columns, since it is not uncommon to hear statements that the press has misquoted someone.

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*Mr Satyamurthy has been contacted about replying to all the reactions by scientists.*

—Editor

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### The 'impossible experiments' of Martin Fleischmann and his school

Martin Fleischmann has a remarkable track record of discoveries that were the results of unconventional experiments. To understand the phenomenon of adsorption of molecules on metallic surfaces, Martin Fleischmann used many new techniques, including Raman spectroscopy. In