

Science administration

The editorial 'Requiem for a missing generation'¹ has done well to raise pertinent questions about science administrators and governing bodies of science institutions in our country.

I would like to make a few observations in this connection. The present setup of science administration in India is inherently feudal. This was perhaps understandable at the time the system was set up, but it is now a serious liability. A feudal approach to administration is inherently personalized and based on the whims and prejudices of a small number of 'eminent' persons. In such a system, senior administrators are given power without accountability, their appointments are based on cronyism rather than administrative merit, and the administration functions in its own interests rather than the interests of the institution.

In order to pass to a new system, we must codify and implement modern administrative principles, namely consultative, transparent and accountable functioning. A few examples would be the election of Chairpersons and Deans by the Faculty for limited terms, the public announcement of search committees and

inviting of nominations for Directorial candidates, and the regular rotation of Governing council members (following consultation with faculty members). Institutions should be subjected to regular peer reviews which critically examine both their science and their administration. Also, those practices in which age or seniority are deemed to be the equivalent of wisdom should be discontinued. Committees should be constituted based on genuine suitability for the given purpose, and we should not panic if the youngest member is made the Chair.

It would also be useful to have a written statement of what tasks are expected to be performed by administrators such as Chairpersons, Deans and Directors, and their performance should be honestly assessed. Reappointment to such positions should be based strictly on past performance. The mission statements of institutions should be formulated or updated, along with their rules and by-laws (which, for many Indian scientific institutions, have remained essentially unchanged since independence, and today seem rather antiquated and irrelevant).

In this context, I cannot help recalling a famous piece of folklore from Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, that a Senior Professor was entitled to commandeering an Institute vehicle, even if another member had already booked it! This pernicious practice may now be forgotten, but it symbolizes the old system, in which it did not matter what was being done so much as who was doing it. It is high time we moved to a new system where personal power and privilege is largely irrelevant and is replaced by consensual, principled functioning in the interests of science.

1. Editorial, *Curr. Sci.*, 2002, **83**, 1297-1298.

SUNIL MUKHI

*Department of Theoretical Physics,
Tata Institute of Fundamental Research,
Mumbai 400 005, India
e-mail: mukhi@tifr.res.in*

Academic standards in Indian universities

I am pained to read the article about academics in universities¹.

In my opinion, the Kulpati is the nucleus of the university and not the teachers. All the appointments in the system are made by the Kulpati. If he is a mediocre person or not fit for the post and having no knowledge of academics, then whatever comes out from his office will have no seal of quality.

The appointment of Kulpati should be by the University Grants Commission or some central academic body. Politics is taking centrestage in the university sys-

tem, because the teachers have devalued themselves.

The role of UGC is also evident in maintaining the standard of education. I appreciate the present role of the UGC. The commission has formed many committees to go through the output of universities and only then to recommend financial grants. UGC is well qualified to look into the problems of the institutions and can solve the problems only if it is not attacked by politicians.

We should have a relook at the procedure for the selection of Vice-Chancellors.

The health of the state can be judged by the quality of education it imparts, and the health of the university can be judged by the actions of its vice-chancellor.

1. Swarnkar, P. L., *Curr. Sci.*, 2002, **83**, 1181-1182.

D. P. GUPTA

*Department of Zoology,
Dr H. S. Gour University,
Sagar 470 003, India*