

Argentini-ans regroup

SIR — With the coming of democracy in Argentina, Argentine research workers have organized their professional association with the aim of “building a science and technology engaged with the reality of the country and contributing to its effective independence and sovereignty”. In the past, a similar society functioned for researchers of the CONICET (Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas) but this was dissolved in 1974 and the members of the board of directors were prosecuted and dismissed from their jobs.

The new association, Asociación Argentina de Investigadores Científicos y Tecnológicos (AADICYT), is open to researchers from all disciplines belonging to universities, institutes, public or private enterprises, CONICET, and so on, and its membership covers all categories of investigators, including new fellows.

The president is Dr Enrique Segura, head of a neurobiology research laboratory of CONICET, and the two vice-presidents are Guillermo Dussel, a physicist at the National Commission of Atomic Energy, and Alberto Solari, professor of the Faculty of Medical Sciences. The secretary is Celina Lértora Mendoza, a philosopher, and the treasurer is Osvaldo Gosman, a mathematician and professor of the University of Belgrano.

The first objectives of the society are directed towards reinstating scientists and professional people who have been dismissed for political or discriminative reasons, whether still in this country or abroad. Also, to appeal to all Argentine investigators who are settled permanently in other countries to collaborate in this effort for the recovery and development of science and technology in Argentina. Various forms of collaboration are suggested: to accept fellows from Argentina in their institutions; to give courses and counselling in Argentina; to engage foreign institutes in cooperative programmes with similar institutions from Argentina. AADICYT is also asking that the authorities in science and technology accept delegates from our association in committees dealing with the institutional organization of science, with the investigation of irregularities, with mechanisms for the democratic participation of the researchers, and with a bylaw of rights and duties of research workers.

The address of AADICYT is given below. Our representative in Europe is Mariano Levin, Institut de Pathologie Moléculaire, 24 rue du Faubourg St. Jacques, Paris XIV, France. Collaborations and suggestions are welcome.

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India's home front

SIR — Self-congratulation is not the prerogative of artists. Scientists, especially Indian scientists, are adept at praising themselves, albeit subtly. In Dr Balasubramanian's letter (*Nature* 307, 312; 1984) the statement that there are “pockets of brilliance” in India, as in any other country, conveniently ignores the embarrassing questions about who is to decide who is brilliant and what constitutes brilliance and gives way to anthropocentricity. It is often forgotten that the greatest “pocket of brilliance” in recent times was not a research institute, but a Swiss patent office. Perhaps the greatest boon of this century is the fact that Albert Einstein was not born in India.

The recent spate of news concerning Indian science and scientists (*Nature* 304, 300; 1983: 4, 100, 307; 1984) tends to support Dr Malviya's contention (*Nature* 306, 10; 1983) rather than Dr Balasubramanian's perspective of science in India. On a recent visit to Indian universities and research institutes, I was appalled at the lopsided funding and facilities present there. Glamour in science rather than research relevant to India's needs guides the over-funded institutes. As a scientist Dr Balasubramanian should realize that comparisons of brilliance can be made only when all other variables are constant.

Dr Balasubramanian continues his self-congratulation in the form of lists (reiteration of what every Indian scientist has been echoing) of accomplishments of Indian scientists. I would not go to the extent of suggesting what some foreign based Indian scientists have been saying: these accomplishments have been made, not because of, but in spite of Indian scientists. Instead of listing the numerous accomplishments, Dr Balasubramanian should have asked “Is this all we have done in the nearly four decades of India's independence?”

I do not agree with everything that Dr Malviya says about Indian science and scientists. Leaving aside the competence of the people who control scientific circles in India, which Dr Malviya questions, I would like to point out that they, at least, have long enjoyed social position and freedom from criticism. Dr Balasubramanian's appeal to stop self-flagellation is nothing but a plea to maintain the *status quo* in Indian science. Science, of all human activities, requires criticism to make us aware of anthropocentric prejudice. I therefore applaud Dr Malviya's attempt at criticism of Indian science and would like to suggest that science governing bodies in India establish an institute and a journal devoted to constructive criticism, where not only scientists but also intelligent taxpayers can debate.

Incidentally, Dr Balasubramanian, pointing out that the issue that carries Dr Malviya's letter also carries an article by

Indian scientists working in India, neglects to mention that the authors of that paper thank another Indian abroad “for the many gifts that made this study possible”.

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SIR — The merit of India's science has been the subject of heated discussion in your correspondence columns. It is a healthy sign that such issues are raised now. A few years ago this would not have happened. Something good will eventually come of the polemics and accusations. The focus must, however, be on self-realization, an agonizing reappraisal at that and not indulgence in whipping by “prodigals” (Dr Malviya) or self-aggrandizement by the “natives” (Dr Balasubramanian): the present “natives” were once “prodigals” themselves.

As for the hostility of the natives towards the prodigals, I can confirm from my own experience. A few years ago, when I visited India for a family reunion, I offered to give a couple of seminars in two important institutions in Madras and Bangalore. The chairman of the chemistry department at one of them replied that in view of their hectic institutional activities, he was “unable” to “host” my seminar. He probably thought it was a favour to me and that I might ask for a job in his department! I subsequently gave a seminar in another department in the same institution without ever meeting the chemistry department chairman.

There is also general apathy among higher-ups towards their “subordinates”. There seem to be no peers among scientists in India — just power brokers and the rest. A few years ago, a prominent Indian expatriate visited India. One of the top science bureaucrats made arrangements to invite him to his office through a back door on the pretext that a lot of others for whom he had no time were waiting to see him at the front door. A lot has to change in the Indian science scene.

Nevertheless, Indian science has made significant progress in the past 35 years. I see good work coming out of the National Chemical Laboratory in Poona in the field of biotechnology, for instance. However, the achievement is minuscule compared with the potential. The myth of India being the third “superpower” in science when one considers the number of scientists and technicians has to be denied. As your correspondent, Vera Rich, observed in a recent report in *Nature*, the scientific force in India is not as awesome as it is made out to be when one considers the quality. But India has the potential. It has to be properly tapped.

Before the Indian government plunges into any bold venture, such as a “science