



Science Reporter

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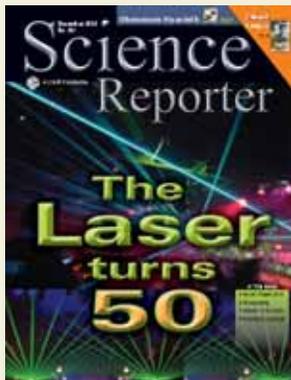
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Indian Science—As the World Sees It

Last month we talked about a vision document for Indian science released by the 32-member Science Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (SAC-PM). The 47-page report, “India as a Global Leader in Science”, charted a roadmap for the growth of Indian science for the next 20 years counting on the youthfulness of the Indian population as a major advantage, recognizing the need for roping in the best teaching talent, the imperatives of creating a huge scientific work force, calling for bigger investments in science, and above all, creating a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in the country.

This month we review the contents of another recently released report, the **UNESCO Science Report 2010: The Current Status of Science Around the World**, in an effort to gauge how the world sees us conducting our science. But before that we take a look at what the Report outlines as some of the broad trends that have characterized the past decade vis-à-vis scientific growth throughout the world.

Primarily, according to the Report, the revolution in R&D in the past decade has come about thanks to cheap and easy access to new digital technologies such as broadband, Internet and mobile phones, which have also facilitated the setting up of R&D centers at remote locations abroad to soak in the benefits that the new locations have to offer.

Secondly, the highly developed nations no longer have the sole grip over knowledge-intensive growth. The Report points out that other countries are fast catching up as far as their investments in tertiary education and R&D are concerned. And finally, the global economic recession seems to have given the Western S&T dominance a sound challenge. Whereas Europe and the USA are struggling to free themselves from the grips of the recession, firms from emerging economies like Brazil, China, India and South Africa are witnessing sustained domestic growth and moving upstream in the value chain, says the UNESCO Report.

Coming to India, Chapter 17, devoted to India, refers to it as one of the world’s fastest growing economies, alongside China. Having sidestepped the global recession, India has been seeing a steady rise in private investment in R&D. With more and more foreign companies establishing R&D centers on Indian soil, most of these focusing on ICTs, the country has become the world’s leading exporter of IT services. In fact, the Report points out how firms from India are also buying up large firms in developed countries thereby acquiring the firms’ knowledge capital overnight. Aerospace exports are also growing by 74% a year.

The adoption of the Indian Patent Act in 2005 to bring India into compliance with the TRIPS agreement did not cause the domestic pharmaceutical industry to slump, contrary to expectations. In fact, emphasizes the UNESCO Report, the pharmaceutical industry is flourishing, even if the domination of foreign firms in patents continues to cast a shadow. India’s share of global patents, barely 0.2%, is a cause for concern as is the fact that most of the patents are being granted to foreign companies located in India, based on R&D projects carried out in India.

The biggest challenge of all, according to the report, will be for India to improve both the quantity and quality of Indian S&T personnel. In this context, the central government’s decision to create 30 universities across the country, including 14 world-class innovation universities, augurs well for the future.

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Printed and published by Deeksha Bist on behalf of the National Institute of Science Communication And Information Resources (NISCAIR), CSIR, Dr K S Krishnan Marg, New Delhi-110 012 and printed at Brijbasi Art Press Ltd., A-81, Sector-5, Noida-201 203.

Science Reporter is published monthly by the National Institute of Science Communication And Information Resources (NISCAIR), CSIR, Dr K S Krishnan Marg, New Delhi-110 012. NISCAIR assumes no responsibility for statements and opinions advanced by the authors or for any claims made in the advertisements published in Science Reporter.

Phones: Editorial: 91-011-25848702 Sales/Subsription: 91-011-25841647 Advertisement: 91-011-25843359 Fax: 91-011-25847062

Email: Editorial: sr@niscair.res.in; hjk@niscair.res.in Sales: lkc@niscair.res.in Website: http://www.niscair.res.in

Subscription: Inland: 1 yr: Rs 200/-; 2 yrs: Rs 380/-; 3 yrs: Rs 540/- Foreign: 1 yr (Air Mail): US \$ 65

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