

'FUNDING CRUNCH IS DISRUPTING RESEARCH'

Relevant for: Science & Technology | Topic: Indigenization of technology and developing new technology

An editorial published in an Indian science journal highlights the gloomy state of science funding in India. Increasing number of research project proposals submitted to different funding agencies are not getting funded, and there is inordinate delay of one or more years in releasing the initial or the subsequent funding when proposals do get approved, says the editorial. And when released, the amount is "often a fraction" of the actual amount approved, says Subhash C. Lakhota in the editorial published in the *Proceedings of the Indian National Academy of Sciences*. Professor Lakhota is from Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi and editor-in-chief of the journal. There is also "undue emphasis" on translational research at the cost of supporting basic research, the editorial says.

The editorial says committee members are often told by the funding agencies either directly or indirectly that "fewer projects should be approved because of constraints on the available funds". The funding not released on time for a new or ongoing project "disrupts the research" leading to lower morale, Professor Lakhota writes.

Funding for science has remained static at about 0.7% of the gross domestic product (GDP) for about two decades. While there would have been an increase in total amount for R&D due to increase in GDP, the marginal increase is "offset by the increase in the number of researchers and institutions" and inflation. "The net result is that in real terms the per capita funds available for R&D activities have not increased but, in fact, may be less," notes the editorial.

Professor Ashutosh Sharma, Secretary, Department of Science and Technology (DST) has contested the claims made in the editorial.

"The funding for science has nearly doubled in 2017-2018 compared with 2014-2015. It has increased by about 65% in the case of Department of Biotechnology (DBT), 45% for Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and 90% for DST."

While he admitted that the number of scientists and institutions has increased, he did not mention if this resulted in a reduction in funding to individual researchers. Denying any fund allocation for ancient Indian science as made out in the editorial, he said: "There is no funding of the kind I know of to prove or disprove ancient Indian science. There is no funding support for pseudoscience. So that is surely not the reason why there is less money for other researchers."

"We have been supporting and funding science in various ways. The National post-doctoral fellowship programme started about one-and-half years ago is funding 2,500 post-docs," Prof. Sharma said. "Each post-doc is funded 10 lakh per year. So we are spending 250 crores per year for this programme. Though funding for this post-doc programme helps research, this does not get reflected in increased science funding."

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