

EDITORIAL

THE NATIONAL SCIENCE COUNCIL AND THE NATURAL RESOURCES, ENERGY AND SCIENCE AUTHORITY - TWENTY FIVE YEARS OF SUPPORT FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN SRI LANKA.

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The first step towards establishing a governmental organization for co-ordinating research at a national level was taken in 1948, when the Government accepted a proposal on this subject from the Ceylon Association for the Advancement of Science. However, implementation of the recommendation took twenty years. The National Science Council (NSC) was set up under the Ministry of Scientific Research and Housing by an Act of Parliament No.9 of 1968. Briefly the main functions of the NSC were to advise the Minister on (a) the application of science to problems of national importance and for the benefit of the community (b) co-ordination of research (c) human resources development in science and technology and (d) science policy. In addition, the NSC was required to initiate and promote scientific research and technological development, improve communication and data collection with respect to science and technology and to forge links with scientists overseas. The Hon. M.D.H. Jayawardena, then Minister of Scientific Research and Housing, appointed twenty one members to the council with Sir Nicholas Attygalle, the eminent obstetrician and gynaecologist, as the first chairman. Among the distinguished members of the first council, Prof. B.A. Abeywickrema still continues to serve on the Editorial Board of the Journal of the National Science Council.

Recognizing the need to develop the natural resources of the country and to conserve and seek new sources of energy, the Natural Resources, Energy and Science Authority of Sri Lanka (NARESA) was created as a successor to the NSC by an Act of Parliament No.78 of 1981. NARESA had the additional functions of advising the Hon. Minister on policy and development strategies for the energy and natural resources sectors. Dr R.P. Jayewardene was appointed as the first Director - General of NARESA.

In an attempt to more productively utilize the science and technology sectors in the drive towards agricultural modernization, rapid industrialization and poverty alleviation, a review of the existing framework and policies for science and technology was considered necessary by the present Minister for Industries, Science and Technology, the Hon. R. Wickremasinghe. On the advice of the Hon. Minister, a Presidential Task Force was established to study and make suitable recommendations on the overhaul of the science and technology sector in Sri Lanka. In the light of the Task Force report, further changes to NARESA, principally directed towards giving it a more focussed role in funding science and technology, are envisaged.

Government organizations concerned with funding science and on deciding science policy are faced with changes in several countries. In the United Kingdom, the five old Research Councils (Agricultural and Food, Economic and Social, Medical, Natural Environment and Science and Engineering Research Councils) will give way to six (Biotechnology and Biological Sciences, Economic and Social, Engineering and Physical Sciences, Medical, Natural Environment and Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Councils). A new post of Director General for Research Councils will be created in the change which is due to take place in 1994. A Council for Science and Technology, chaired by the U.K. Minister for Science, is also to be established with six industrialists among the ten non-government members. In the United States, a National Council on Science and Technology to plan and coordinate the government's research and development programmes has been proposed. The council is to be chaired by the President and is envisaged to function as a policy centre much like the National Security Council and the National Economic Council. The changes in the United Kingdom and the United States anticipate a more prominent role for science and technology in the societies of the 21st century.

We expect that NARESA and its successor will continue to play a seminal role in encouraging science and technology, and thereby national development, in Sri Lanka. The Journal of the National Science Council of Sri Lanka will also continue to perform the vital function of communicating the results of scientific and technological research to the scientific community.