

■ Shekhar C Mande: Spectacular rise in budget for S&T

CSIR has no financial emergency, says DG

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Last year, the former Director General of Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) Dr Girish Sahni had reportedly written a letter about CSIR undergoing a "financial emergency" with little money to spare for lab allocations and research.

A year later, the new DG Dr Shekhar C Mande who succeeded Dr Sahni in October, says that there has been no financial emergency. "I cannot comment on whether Dr Sahni has actually said it, or whether he was quoted out of context. However, the thing about financial emergency has been blown out of proportion. There has been a spectacular increase in the budget for science and technology over five years. This year's budget allocation for Ministry of Science and Technology alone is over Rs 10,000 crores, which I think is a generous funding," he told DC.

He was on a visit to



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CSIR-National Institute for Interdisciplinary Science and Technology (CSIR-NIIST), his first visit, since he took charge. Before meeting DC, he had assured researchers that their delayed fellowships will soon be released. "Please don't go on a hunger strike for that," he joked, as the students laughed.

The structural biologist received Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize for Biological Sciences in 2005, after investing a lot of time in fundamental science. But lately there has been an anxiety among those doing research in basic science after the government

asked institutions to rely more on industry. DC asked him if the government policy encouraged application-based science more than fundamental science.

He said, "Any government would wish that government-funded scientific research should benefit society. But the government does not say stop basic science programme. We do research in fundamental science and also get to show that some of the programmes have been translated to industry."

When asked if there was a greater thrust on external funding, he said that laboratories always had to depend on it. "CSIR has worked closely with the industry since its inception. In 1942, a significant amount of funding for 5 CSIR labs came from Tata Sons," he said.

When asked what the amount of external funding was, he said, "We have substantial external cash flow. I do not have the numbers on my finger tips."

He is also a top func-

tionary of the RSS-affiliated Vijnana Bharathi. He was asked about the scientist's role in engaging with the public, when myths and unscientific claims are peddled as science. "Scientists, and CSIR particularly, have always taken a stand against myths without rational support. There was a myth about not having food during the eclipse. Scientists have said that this is not true. When Ramar Pillai claimed to make herbal fuel," CSIR-Indian Institute of Petroleum was asked to investigate into it, and it was disproved."

He was asked about mythology being used to talk about ancient India's contributions to science. "I won't talk about mythology. However fact remains that India has contributed to the progress of science and art," he replied.

He listed the discovery of zero, the precision of Madhava school of Mathematics and various other contributions in recorded history, as evidence for this.