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### "Science is as creative as any artistic pursuit"

Special Correspondent

*Scientific institutions urged to recruit the most talented youth*

— Photo: S.R. Raghunathan



**DETECTING A SPARK: Aspiring scientists are all ears as they interact with Bruce Alberts, Editor-in-Chief, Science, and M.S. Swaminathan, chairman, MSSRF, after the second millennium lecture hosted by The Hindu Media Resource Centre in Chennai on Monday.**

CHENNAI: Doing science can be as creative, imaginative and innovative as any artistic pursuit, Bruce M. Alberts, Editor-in-Chief of *Science*, said on Monday.

In his millennium lecture on 'Science and our World's Future' hosted by *The Hindu* Media Resource Centre, Dr. Alberts called for a good science education programme starting at school. "Early encouragement to tackle problems can produce a generation of youngsters with the can-do attitude that is essential to be competitive in the global economy."

In a talk that was interspersed with references to the Nehruvian coinage 'scientific temper' and influential quotes by British biologist Jacob Bronowski and path-breaking French scientist Louis Pasteur, Dr. Alberts advocated that scientific institutions recruit the most talented young people and follow it up with a credible system of rewarding merit. "We certainly don't want politics in science."

Dr. Alberts cited the charter of the National Academy of Sciences, founded in the U.S. in 1863, which stated that it shall not accept any compensation from government, to drive home the importance of the autonomy of a research institution. This mission statement rendered the Academy immune to external

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pressure, safeguarding its role as an objective advisor, unlike a few think tanks which, having been commissioned by government, took pains to fudge their findings to avoid displeasing the State, he said.

The celebrated molecular biologist called upon scientific institutions to reward failure of experiments. Something original invariably emerged only from taking risks, he said.

Dr. Alberts said it was imperative for scientists to appreciate that new knowledge emerged from building upon the existing knowledge blocks left behind by their predecessors.

However, in an era of knowledge explosion, the challenge was to get the right combination of knowledge blocks. “Eventually innovation is all about discernment choice where one eliminates the useless combinations.”

M.S. Swaminathan, chairman of the Dr. M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, said the foundation had initiated an online course in sustainable sciences. The programme advocated action education and involved sampling real-life scenarios such as the ecosystem of the Himalayas or the wetlands of Kuttanad in Kerala.

Ajay Parida, Director (Biotechnology), MSSRF, spoke.

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