Indian Science Congress - Changing Trend

Why in news?

The 107th edition of the Indian Science Congress (ISC) was recently held in Bengaluru.

What does the ISC aim at?

- The formation of the congress pre-dates the Indian republic.
- However, it was the intellectual nursery of modern science in the country.
- Early ideas of how science and technology could aid the development of the new nation were initiated at this gathering of scientists.
- It is for this reason that the congress is inaugurated by the Prime Minister.
- It is normally held in the first week of January.

What is the change in trend?

- The nature of the congress where scientists congregated to exchange scientific ideas has changed.
- It is today becoming a 'science mela'.
- The prime purpose of the ISC now is to draw school and science college students to hear Nobel Laureates and Indian-origin scientists from abroad.
- It lectures about their work and the future prospects of science.
- The other draws are science projects and innovations by schoolchildren and stalls showcasing scientific work being done in key national laboratories and institutions.

What is the recent concern?

- In recent years, the congress often makes news for becoming a forum for pseudoscience and less for interesting scientific ideas or demonstrations.
- Speakers have tended to mix mythology and science and publicise far-fetched assertions.
- E.g. the Kauravas were born from stem-cell technology and the Vedas discussed avionics
- This has eroded the congress's public image.
- The exhibits at several scientific laboratories too are re-runs from old congresses, or from similar and past science fairs.
- Many laboratories showcase their work as 'posters' rather than actually

showing demonstrations or working inventions.
- Several top personalities of India's science establishments who have represented or at least had their organisation present a dedicated talk or session, were absent this year.

What is the way forward?

- It is inevitable that traditions change over time and the relative importance accorded to institutions wax and wane.
- However, this must make way for inspiring new ideas, or new models of taking science to the public.
- A rising trend in science displays, at museums or exhibitions in many places, is to mix science and art.
- Making interactive displays that encourage audience engagement is also the trend.
- In this light, the Indian Science Congress too needs new ideas, and not a mix of myth and pseudoscience.

Source: The Hindu

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