

## EDITORIAL

### THE PHYSICS OLYMPIAD

Competitive exams are not a new feature for the urban Indian middle class household. At the post-graduate level the IAS and Civil Services Exams, GATE, and the Combined Admissions Test for the top management schools are some of the buzz words familiar to most of us. At the high school level and pre-degree level, the Joint Entrance Exam (JEE) conducted by the Indian institutes of Technology (the IIT's) is considered by many to be the ultimate test of competence in Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics. The IAPT has been conducting its own Physics competency test, the National Standard Examinations in Physics (NSEP) for the last several years. But soon we shall have what I consider, the comprehensive test for competency in Physics for high school and pre-degree students, namely, the **Physics Olympiad**.

The IIT's must be acknowledged for raising the awareness and competency standards in Physics. Year after year their JEE question papers have been critically scrutinised and acclaimed for including questions of originality and a high level of difficulty. But of late, it has been noticed that the test is more of speed than of ability and competency. The mushrooming of private coaching centers geared towards preparing students for the JEE, easily a multi-million industry, is a partial testimony to this. Another criticism that one may make is that the JEE does not test experimental skills. The IAPT cannot be faulted on this count. It has, in spite of severe handicaps, included an experimental component in its evaluations. The tests leading to the International Physics Olympiad will be more comprehensive and balanced. They will, we hope stress ability and competency as opposed to speed. We also hope that they will invite the participants to exercise their "physics" intuition and visualization skills and not merely their expertise in manipulating mathematical symbols. They will also have the essential experimental component. Our young aspirants can look forward to a test which will challenge them at all levels. It will be the **ACID TEST**.

The implementation of the Physics Olympiad programme will be carried out by the IAPT and the Homi Bhabha Center for Science Education (HBCSE) which is a Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) assisted institute in Mumbai. The NSEP conducted by IAPT will identify about 200 meritorious students across the nation. These students will appear for the Indian National Physics Olympiad (INPhO) exams at ten centers in different parts of the country. Approximately 35 students will be selected to receive the NSEP-INPhO gold medals and they will undergo a month long training programme at HBCSE, Mumbai. The top five students will be identified to receive merit awards and to represent India in the International Physics Olympiad (IPhO) starting 1999. The selection process is rigorous in the extreme.

Several of us believe that our young aspirants shall perform ably in the International Physics Olympiad. Our best are comparable to the best one can find anywhere in the world. Here is wishing the organizers and the participants the very best in the years to come.

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