Let's not allow them to patronise us

The United States's reaction to India's nuclear achievements as reflected in its expulsion of Indian scientists working in US institutions is illogical and irrational. It is also inconsistent with its stand on the freedom of movement of scientists internationally.

About a decade ago, before India had recognised Israel and South Africa, there were cases of some scientists from these countries encountering difficulties in getting an Indian visa. On such occasions, the local organisers of scientific meetings made every effort to secure Indian visas for these scientists. Even so, a few scientists in the US made an issue of it and called upon other scientists to ban such conferences.

Now that such a ban is being practised by the US itself, is it too much to expect the US scientific community to protest against its government's unilateral action? Several US scientists from the Department of Energy have protested — and that's a welcome step.

We must learn to be more self-reliant in our scientific infrastructure and research. We must also maintain our self-respect when the US decides to lift the ban, advises Prof Jayant V. Narlikar.

If so, why are they so afraid of Indian scientists visiting the US? Obviously they believe that the achievement is significant, but do not wish to admit it in public.

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the US has been the undisputed leader of the world. At times it seems the US has taken upon itself the task of policing and being the 'moral-keeper' of the rest of the world. The recent US action against Indian science is in keeping with this 'holier than thou' attitude.

It has, therefore, become critical for nations such as India to introspect upon the extent of their dependence on the US for any scientific programme. The more self-reliant we are in our scientific infrastructure and research, the less will we have to suffer from such a unilateral ban.

The lesson here for the Indian scientific community is to become a member of the nuclear club. Which means that they consider it trivial.

As far as astronomy and astrophysics are concerned, a lot of research is being done in India with the US through free exchange of information and access to data. The one-to-one interaction between Indian scientists and their US counterparts continues to be informal and cordial despite what their respective governments say from time to time.

Science transcends all national barriers; it thrives on the exchange of ideas and mutual cooperation between nations. Barring matters pertaining to national security, there is limitless scope for collaboration between India and the US which expulsions and bottling of information have no role.

I expect the US administration will soon have second thoughts, and there will be a subsequent softening of their attitudes and policies. Nevertheless, our scientific community must retain its dignity and self-respect while responding to any such 'patronising' overtures from the US.