Sir - The first Elizabethan era saw the launching of the British East India Company that led in turn to the spread of British rule and a British Empire across much of the globe. The second Elizabethan era began with the process of decolonisation, replacing Empire with the Commonwealth, and this process still continues. However, what will stand out in the long annals of history as perhaps the greatest legacy of the second Elizabethan era, will be the enormous progress in science leading to the conquest of space. Human space travel, landings on the Moon and planets, the operation of space telescopes that have the capacity to probe the very beginnings of life in the cosmos – these will be the timeless achievements that will mark out the era that has just passed.

Prof Chandra Wickramasinghe