Towards promotion of Biotechnology in Bangladesh

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NEVER before has Bangladesh witnessed such a successful conference on biotechnology as the one entitled, "Promotion of Biotechnology in Bangladesh: National and International Perspectives." While welcoming the recently gazetted biotech policy, members of both the resident and non-resident biotech community expressed their consensus that the whole document needs to be recast in order for it to be internationally recognized.

Conference Preparation: It was an uphill task to arrange the recently concluded 3-day conference on biotechnology. Thanks to the tireless efforts of the organizers, staff and students of Dhaka University, ICDDR, B, and BRAC University, all the sessions commenced on time and almost all the speakers showed up and presented papers in multifaceted disciplines of biotechnology. The venue of the conference was the auditorium of ICDDR, B, providing all facilities including multimedia as well as an uninterrupted power supply, which contributed greatly to the success of the conference.



Objectives: One of the objectives of the conference, apart from recasting the National Biotech Policy, was to take stock of research scientists available within the country and abroad. The organizers admitted that that they had no idea that Bangladesh is so rich in human resources in almost all disciplines of biotech. The majority of speakers had completed their higher degrees in the recent past from well-known laboratories in the West, Australia, India and Japan.

Towards a Conducive Environment for Research: It's now up to the policy makers to create the proper research environment to retain these young talents, by providing them modern equipments, dependable Internet connectivity, and sufficient incentive in addition to a standard salary. There was consensus that these objectives can be realized if a National Commission for Biotechnology, with an independent secretariat and budget under revenue head, is formed by the government, as has been done in Pakistan and India. The biotech community expressed satisfaction that the building that has been recently completed to house the National Institute of Biotechnology at Savar has been designed as per international standard.

Of the NIB on Government Revenue: It was also pointed out that with time, the institute would be less and less dependent on the Government, as the carefully recruited scientists will come up with patents of solutions of many technical problems faced by the industry. It was also suggested that some of the proven technology that no longer have patent protection should be tried in order for NIB to earn extra revenue in its attempt to become self-sufficient. Such programs may include: generation of gas and electricity from city garbage, production of baker's yeast etc.

Inauguration of the Conference and the Distinguished Audience: Mr. Tapan Chowdhury, Adviser for Ministry of Science, Information and Communications Technology, was the Chief Guest at the inauguration. The Guest of honor was Dr. C. S. Karim, Adviser for Agriculture. Others present on the occasion were Dr. David Sack, Executive Director ICDDR, B; Professor M. Shamsher Ali, President, Bangladesh Academy of Sciences, Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury, VC, BRAC University. They placed their important views regarding harnessing this powerful discipline of science for the economic benefit of the country. On behalf of the biotech community, Professor Naiyyum Choudhury and Professor Ahmed A. Azad explained the objectives of the conference and spelled out the direction in which biotech research should be carried out in Bangladesh in order to be internationally competitive and at the same time contribute to the economy of the country. The video message from Major General Dr. Matiur Rahman, the Health Adviser, who could not attend on account of WHO's International Immunization Day, was played at the concluding session. Other distinguished speakers were Mr. S.M. Wahiduz-Zaman, Secretary, Ministry of Science, Information and Communications Technology; Prof. Yusuf Haider, Pro-VC, D.U., Mr. Mahfuz Anam, Editor, the Daily Star, and Mr. Abdul Awal Mintoo, Chairman, East West Seeds.

Speakers: Invited speakers from Turkey, Pakistan and Malaysia and expatriates from Canada, Australia, Saudi Arabia, and USA captivated the audience. They were Professor Mehmet Ozturk, Chairman, Department of Molecular Biology and Genetics, Bilkent University, Turkey; Dr. Anwar Nasim, Science Adviser, COMSTECH, Pakistan and Professor Dr. Asma bin Ismail, Medical biotechnologist from the Universiti Sains, Malaysia.