that internationally competitive biosciences research should be carried out by those best equipped to do this, namely the R&D laboratories in the West, and the relatively technologically proficient and rapidly advancing countries of the developing world such as China, India and Brazil.

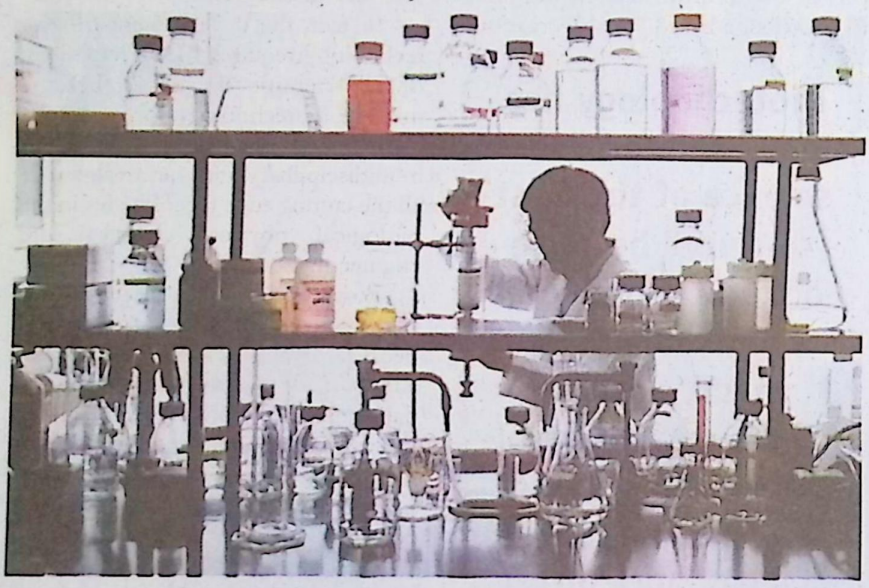
This defeatist attitude ignores the actual needs and underestimates the existing capabilities in the scientifically lagging countries of the developing world, including the least developed ones.

Such thinking will ensure that the agenda for growth and sustainability will continue to remain externally driven, and scientifically lagging countries, particularly the least developed countries, will be reduced to permanent dependency and perhaps to permanent destitution.

The development of an agenda that allows scientists in Bangladesh and the OIC region to carry out internationally competitive biotechnology research relevant to national and regional needs while working from their home base, or within the region, also requires the development of "centers of excellence" that will benefit individual countries and the entire OIC region. It is extremely important that Bangladesh establish at least one real center of excellence in biotechnology.

It is not feasible or practical for Bangladesh to compete with the rest of the world in all areas of biomedical and agricultural research. There must be national focus on only a small number of priority areas where there is strength and potential. A proper national priority exercise needs to be carried out to decide on research areas where we can realistically make major inroads, and be internationally competitive, and contribute to national development.

Very valuable information on the current status of biotechnology research in Bangladesh was obtained from the proceedings of a conference on "Promotion and Development of biotechnology in Bangladesh: National and International Perspectives" held in Dhaka recently. Over three days (April 6-8) over 350 researchers, academics, students, and representatives from government, local pharmaceutical and seed companies, and NGOs met under one roof to discuss achievements, problems and the way forward.



It was fortunate that three advisors of the CTG who do understand the importance and need for science and technology, Mr. Tapan Choudhury (Science and ICT), Dr. C. S. Karim (Agriculture) and Dr. A.S.M. Matiur Rahman (Health), very strongly supported, and participated in, the conference. This is unprecedented in Bangladesh, and a sign of the window of opportunity that now exists during the tenure the current CTG.

The conference was a real eye opener, as probably no one in Bangladesh anticipated the strength and depth of biotechnology research that already exists, and most researchers probably became aware for the first time of what others in the country were doing. The conference proceedings also exposed a number of weaknesses that need to be addressed.

Only a very small number of isolated groups use, or have access to, modern biotechnology and cutting edge technologies. Very important advances in conventional plant breeding have been made in the various agricultural institutes but modern Biotechnology remains a "poor cousin," and there is very little national coordination.

The funding for biotechnology research in Bangladesh is miniscule in comparison with India, or even with developing countries in the OIC such as Pakistan, Malaysia and Turkey, and even that is operated by various ministries without any coordination at the national level.

The lack of full-time researchers in Bangladesh is a very critical problem and, unlike many other developing countries, there is no funding for PhD and post-doctoral researchers. Also, there is no coordinated plan for the employment within the country of young biotechnologists who are now graduating in large numbers. So the Bangladeshi universities are, in effect, training biotechnology and life science graduates, at great cost to the country, for the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries in the West.

Unlike India, and many smaller developing countries, the private sector in Bangladesh is yet to make an impact in the area of biopharmaceuticals and agricultural biotechnology, as there is no linkage with the government or the research community.

The potential for this sector is very great and the local industries are very enthusiastic, but they require support from the government and the research community if they are to emulate what has already happened in the rapidly advancing countries of the developing world.

While the Bangladeshi biotechnology community has warmly welcomed