(S&T) proficiency. I will use the example of jute to illustrate the point.

Through the use of modern technology jute could become a trump card for Bangladesh if genomic studies lead to the identification and incorporation of genetic traits that result in improved fibre quality and generation of new varieties able to withstand environmental and biological stresses.

Even though this is a fairly long-term research and development project the agriculture minister has personally intervened to provide the initial research funding to start the collaboration. This is just the beginning and much more funding is required over time. If successful this technology-driven project would ensure that Bangladesh will regain its premier position as an exporter of jute and jute products and this could bring about radical changes to the rural economy and industrial landscape.

Higher education and S&T proficiency do not come cheap but ignorance and persistent backwardness is much more costly for any country. I will not dwell on this here as I have previously discussed in detail what Bangladesh can learn from the experiences of others and what measures it needs to take to become internationally competitive in higher education and research (*Forum*, Sept 2009).

The most effective way of making the best use of higher education and scientific research for national development, in terms of cost and productivity, is the establishment of at least one postgraduate research university that focuses on areas of the highest national priority and helps to foster and coordinate multidisciplinary and multi-institutional collaborations between currently disparate and geographically separated research groups that possess complementary expertise and facilities. This will be dealt with in detail in a future article.

So where is the money coming from to fund the required improvement in higher education and S&T proficiency? How can scientists and academics be induced to collaborate and coordinate their activities in the absence of serious political will and lack of coordination between relevant government ministries and departments? What are the strategies and mechanisms for delivering the fruits of higher education and research to the sections of populations and regions of the country that need it most? These are very important questions for the government and policy makers to ponder and find an answer to if the desire to realise Vision 2021 is serious.

As a resource-poor, cash-strapped, and S&T-lagging country it is very important for Bangladesh to coordinate activities and pool resources and expertise in technology-driven development projects. Not only is there very little interaction between the government, academia and industry, but also negligible coordination between government departments and sometimes within sections of the same ministry.

The prime minister herself has raised concerns about this national weakness. The cabinet must show political will and develop and implement procedures for coordinating technology-driven development efforts, and identify the lead ministry or department for each major project. This is especially critical for multi-institutional research collaborations as the potential partners in academic and research centres fall under the jurisdiction of different ministries.

Lack of funds for R&D in Bangladesh is more a perception than reality. The total amount available may be miniscule compared to the R&D budgets of our immediate neighbours but even the limited amount can make a difference if it is not spread too thin and if the spending is coordinated and focused into development projects of highest national priority.

A substantial amount of funds are already available from the UGC for enhancement of post-graduate research capacity, and from other government departments for addressing national priorities such as food, energy and environmental security.

In many cases the individual grants are too small to make an impact and often funding for the same activity is provided by different government bodies leading to unnecessary duplication and lack of funding for other important components of the same project.

It would be very helpful if different government departments coordinated their activities when tackling common projects and provided different but complementary funding for different components of the same project.

For achieving increased productivity it would also be strategically important to use the funding mechanism to encourage multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional collaboration as no individual research group or institution in Bangladesh is likely to possess the full range of expertise and facilities needed for success. Is this plea for changes to the traditional way of doing things too much to ask from a government that takes pride in calling itself a "*din bodoler shorkar*"?

As an LDC and as one of the countries most prone to the adverse effects of global warming Bangladesh is likely to receive a substantial amount of the climate change funds promised