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"My vision is to bring Asian countries together"

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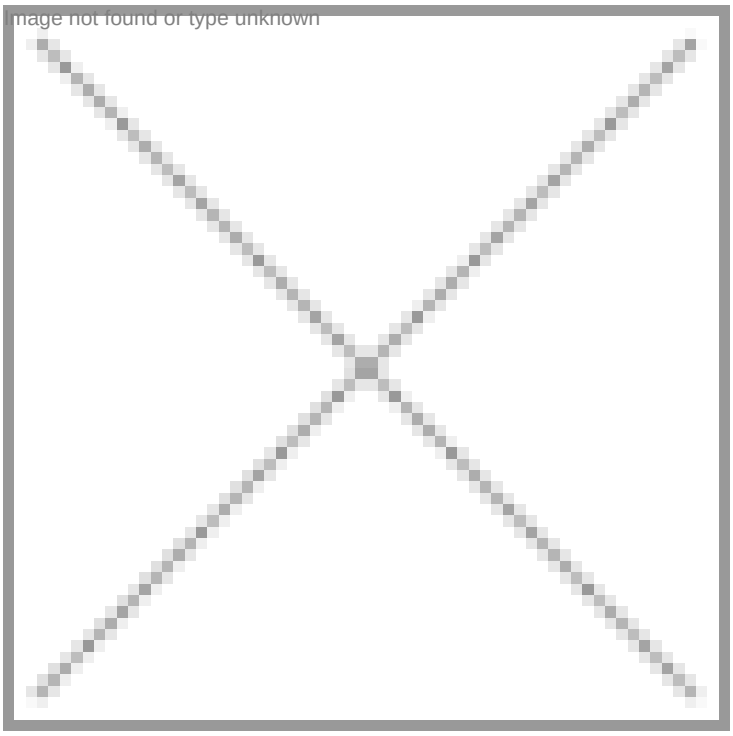

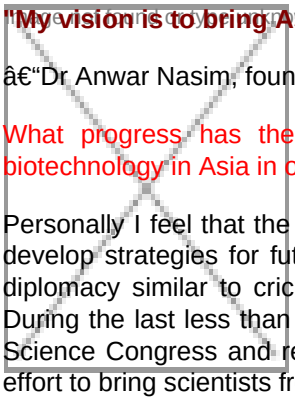

"My vision is to bring Asian countries together"

â€“Dr Anwar Nasim, founding President, Federation of Asian Biotech Associations (FABA)

What progress has the Federation of Asian Biotech Associations (FABA) made to meet its objective of promoting biotechnology in Asia in over a year's time?

Personally I feel that the creation of FABA provides an opportunity for biotechnologists from India and Pakistan to meet and develop strategies for future collaboration. As a matter of fact, during the launch of FABA, a colleague called this vaccine diplomacy similar to cricket diplomacy. A number of activities have followed after the launch of FABA in February 2005. During the last less than two years, I have been to India four times - twice to Hyderabad, once to Ahmedabad to attend the Science Congress and recently to Mumbai. I emphasize this because as far as my knowledge goes, this is the first formal effort to bring scientists from the two countries closer with efforts to promote business opportunities in biotechnology.

I personally feel this is an achievement. We still find many obstacles/restrictions on number of visas granted to scientists by both governments. That often requires researchers to wait for a long time before they can confirm their journey to their hosts in the neighboring country. Although there is good news on increasing relations between the two countries, travel between the countries still remains somewhat difficult.

What model has FABA adopted to reach out to all the corners of Asia?

FABA has registered its own constitution, which permits the Federation to enroll any Asian country as its member and

establish its chapter for carrying out local activities and also coordinate with the headquarters located at Hyderabad (India). FABA is making all-out efforts to enroll most of the countries in Asia as its members through personal contacts. The key approach for FABA is to strengthen the cooperation between India and Pakistan and then launch this on to other Asian countries. I have already contacted Bangladesh, China and Japan. The main objective is for Asian countries to join hands to benefit from the industrial potential of biotechnology. India and China have already made very impressive progress in biotechnology and hope other Asian nations can benefit from their experience.

Which countries have joined FABA as members? How would they be benefit from membership?

During the formation of FABA in February 2004, we had eight founding members - India, Israel, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand. But when we formally launched in February 2005, two more countries, Iran and Saudi Arabia joined FABA totaling the strength to 10. FABA will start independent chapters in all the member countries. Countries like Yemen, China, Japan, Bangladesh and Turkey are negotiating for membership through their biotech organizations. Correspondence is in hand and hopefully some of these countries will become members shortly.

FABA is designed as a platform that will help the member countries to tap each other's strengths for the development of biotechnology in the Asian region. FABA will also try to help the member organizations (biotech companies and academics) to become familiar with biotechnologies that are available in the region through hosting trade shows and fostering links among industry players and between industry and academia. FABA will also help the members to obtain royalties, perhaps with better terms than they might get if they were negotiating on their own with companies from developed countries.

What are the initiatives/activities FABA has taken so far to act as bridge between various stakeholders of biotechnology industry among member countries?

Keeping in mind the objectives of the FABA, we organized a two-day tripartite-planning meeting on agriculture biotechnology in Lahore in May 2005. Besides the local scientists, we invited leading scientists from the US and India such as Dr Roger Beachy, Dr Patricia Wrightson, Dr MS Swaminathan, Dr V L Chopra, Dr Manju Sharma, Dr C R Bhatia and Dr R K Singh to discuss and develop collaborative projects and to identify partners for joint ventures so as to overcome the overlapping issues pertaining to agriculture sector in India and Pakistan. A website of FABA has been finalized and it will be hosted shortly.

What is your future plan of action?

Considering the good response to our first initiative in Pakistan, we have planned many activities for the benefit of the member countries and also for mutual interaction between biotech industries located in different countries:

The Pakistan chapter of FABA is organizing a workshop/conference on "Business Opportunities in Industrial Biotechnology: Destination Pakistan" to be held at Lahore, from December 6 to 8, 2005. Representatives from all member countries, particularly India and Pakistan are expected to participate in this conference.

The accords already signed between Pakistan and India during BioAsia 2004 and 2005 will be reviewed, the progress made so far and further actions to implement these accords will be taken in those cases where not much progress has been made. During this conference, FABA proposes to cover topics like human and animal vaccines, emerging biotech products, human genetic disorder and diagnostics, herbal drugs, transgenic crops and animals in agri-biotech and novel drug delivery system. These topics are of great importance for both India and Pakistan for developing mutual business.

FABA is actively involved in organizing BioAsia 2006 with AIBA-SC and AP government during February 2006 at Hyderabad.

FABA is involved in organizing an international conference on "Biotechnology for Sustainable Agriculture and Agro-industry" along with Andhra Pradesh Industrial Development Corporation (APIDC), Andhra Pradesh government, AP Netherlands Biotechnology Programme and some others, from March 9-11, 2006 at Hyderabad. Topics such as biotechnology for improvement of seeds, food production, post harvest technology, gene technologies for stress tolerance, biotechnology for live-stock improvement, medicinal plants and energy plantations, non-chemical approaches in farming, biopharmaceuticals, and nutraceuticals, emerging trends in aquaculture and marine biotechnology and B2B meetings for establishing collaborations, joint venture, outsourcing and contract research are being included in this conference.

FABA has taken steps to organize a two-week training program on "Basic Recombinant DNA Technologies" for about 10-15 participants (one each from its member country) during September 2006. The director, Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics (CDFD) has agreed to provide this training and required facilities at his institute. Details are being worked out.

My vision of the future is to bring Asian countries together and see how best we can benefit by involving the industry to help

benefit from biotechnology.

Europe

EU Court overturns Austrian law to ban GM crops

The Court of First Instance has ruled on the case brought by Upper Austria and Austria against the Commission in regard to the former's Article 95 ban on planting GMOs. The court rejected all four of the applicant's legal pleas, having found them to be misplaced, unfounded, or irrelevant. The court dismissed all of the actions brought by the applicants.

The court said the member state had failed to show that the measure was scientifically justified. The court said a deviation from EU law was not warranted in this case, and that the arguments used to invoke the precautionary principle lacked substance. The actions were dismissed in their entirety and the costs to be paid by the region

"We are satisfied that EU law, which member states including Austria only recently put in place, has been upheld. The ruling confirms that member states may not abuse safeguard procedures to prohibit the use of safe, licensed GM products in their territory," said Simon Barber, director of the plant biotechnology unit at EuropaBio â€“ the EU Association for Bioindustries.

The Republic of Austria, on March 13, 2003, notified the Commission of the OberÃ¶sterreichisches Gentechnik-Verbotsgesetz 2002, a draft law of the Land OberÃ¶sterreich (Province of Upper Austria) banning genetic engineering. The measure was intended to prohibit the cultivation of GM seed and planting material and secure a derogation from EU rules (Directive 2001/18). The notification relied on a repo rt entitled GMOfree areas of farming: conception and analysis of scenarios and steps for realisation. The Commission requested the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to issue an opinion on the scientific information relied on by the Republic of Austria.

Source: www.europabio.org

Council fails to vote on biotech maize

The European Union (EU) Agriculture Council of Ministers was unable to reach agreement on the import and processing of 1507 maize (1) - genetically modified with a Bt gene, making it resistant to certain insect pests and was jointly developed by Pioneer Hi-Bred International and Dow AgroSciences - including animal feed use in the European Union.

The product is already approved in 12 other countries around the world and meets all the EU's regulatory requirements, including three positive safety opinions from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) for all its intended uses in the EU.

While again some member states have failed to vote according to the positive scientific opinion by EFSA, it is heartening to note that more member states voted positively for approving 1507 maize than when this dossier was reviewed by the Regulatory Committee in May this year.

"We hope that more member states will recognize the benefits of genetically modified organisms for Europe's agriculture, for the environment and for the developing world and evaluate them scientifically on a case by case basis," said Simon Barber, director of the plant biotechnology unit at EuropaBio, the EU Association for Bioindustries.

"Denmark was one of the member states responsible for the moratorium and by dropping its blanket opposition to GMOs, has demonstrated its support for EU regulations and of the benefits of GMOs," he added.

Source: www.europabio.org