

Why Not a BIO India Show?

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The world's largest biotech industry meeting, BIO 2004, organized by the US Biotech Industry Organization, just got over. It was a phenomenal success by any industry standards. There were nearly 17,000 participants from all over the world who had gathered in San Francisco from 6-9 June for the annual event. From a sedate start in 1993 with just 2,500 participants, mainly from the US-based biotech companies, BIO has come a long way in 11 years.

There is a clamor for participation. The organizers have a tough time choosing the speakers for various sessions from among the best industry professionals. For every speaker chosen, at least five equally good ones have to sit among the audience. Such is the prestige attached to the conference that just half-a-dozen ministers handling biotechnology in their government gets to address an elite audience and show case the biotech capabilities of their countries. India was very lucky as DBT secretary Dr M K Bhan got to speak at the prestigious Ministerial session.

Participants from India and elsewhere, whose numbers are increasing every year, admire the meticulousness with which the event has been organized year after year. There is a lot of learning for the Indian biotechnology sector as it gears up for its own major event, the fourth edition of Bangalore Bio from 11-13 July. India's first and oldest biotech event had to be postponed from the regular April dates to July due to the elections. On the other hand, BIO has announced the dates for its annual event for all the years up to 2009. The event calendar is fixed for June. In 2005, it will be in Philadelphia, followed by

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Chicago (2006), Boston (2007), San Diego (2008) and Atlanta (2009). Preparations have already started for the next year's event. It helps everyone to plan their activities to make full use of the presence of global audience.

Another noteworthy fact is that BIO has chapters in many American states and in countries like Taiwan and Germany. This is something our biotechnology sector should try to emulate. Our small and growing industry should conserve the energies for one big event (probably the Indian version of BIO, as BIO India) and rotate it annually to various cities. Fix the dates and venues so that everyone can work together to make this a huge success and provide a single window to the best of Indian biotechnology every year.

We have a multiplicity of industry organizations dealing with biotechnology and too many events (at least three back-to-back biotech industry events have been planned for February 2005 in New Delhi, Hyderabad and Mumbai). Some of the industry leaders have informally discussed the need to consolidate the events and present a unified face to the world. These discussions should be taken forward quickly before a slew of event-related announcements are made in the coming months. The industry has to think beyond its narrow interest.

Listen to what BIO's founder president Carl B Feldbaum said in his farewell speech at San Francisco: " BIO's members have not only forged a new, socially responsible identity for our young industry, but you have also forged a wholly new type of trade association, one not mired in its own narrow commercial interests and instincts, but much more expansive and contemplative in its thinking and increasingly enmeshed in the issues of access and fairness, of ethnicity, race and religion- put simple, the issues of the individuals, communities and nations that we live and work among."

I am sure we can create our own successful global gathering in BIO India soon.

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