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A national symposium on "Development and Nurturing of Emerging Interface between Medical Science and Biotechnology" was held in Gauhati University today on September 2, 2013. The seminar was inaugurated by Ghulam Nabi Azad, union minister of health and family welfare.

Addressing the inaugural session, Azad said the history of biotechnology is several centuries' old, beginning with identification of organisms for production of cheese and bread, different kinds of alcohols, enzymes and many antibiotics over the years. Development of hybrid animals and plants for producing better varieties for milk or meat production are the examples of utilization of genetic re-combinations for commercial purposes.

During recent years translational research has emerged as an important area for healthcare in general and the biotechnology and the pharmaceutical industries in particular. Over the years, biotechnology has become much more refined since we are now able to operate at the gene level. In case of healthcare applications, science has now moved from genetics in which selected genes were targeted and studied to genomics in which the structure and function of the genes of a particular species can be studied simultaneously by using DNA chips. Molecular methods are proving to be very useful in diagnosis and tracking. A recent example has been the effective tracking of sources and control of polio by the Entero-virus Research Centre of ICMR, Mumbai.

Azad said government has been supportive, resulting in the rapid strides in biotechnology and medical products in the country. Sensing the need to nurture cutting edge research, the government of India created a Department of Biotechnology two decades ago. Today, substantial financial support is being extended not only through Department of Biotechnology, but many other central agencies such as Department of Science and Technology (DST), Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Defence Research Development Organization (DRDO), Ministry of Environment and Forests and Indian Council of Medical Research under the Department of Health Research of Health Ministry.

These agencies are not only nurturing the interface between our national requirements and the biological sciences but also spurring innovations by making intense efforts on translational and implementation research. The process has received a greater impetus during the last three years with dedicated infrastructure to identify and translate leads into products, processes and technologies for improving the healthcare delivery services.