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"Human genetics is an area where India has a very diverse gene pool and can be of much help."

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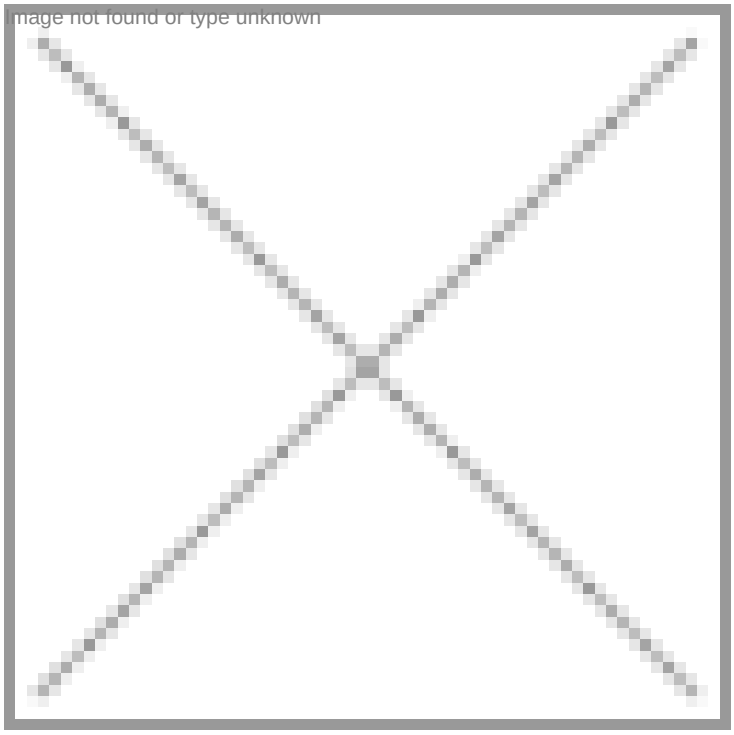
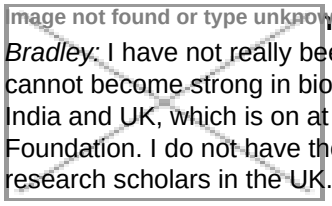


Prof. Allan Bradley, director of UK's leading genome sequencing facility, Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, Cambridge and Prof. Robin Howard Lovell-Badge, head of Division of Developmental Genetics, MRC National Institute for Medical Research, London share their thoughts on what kind of collaboration is possible between India and UK.



What is possible between India and UK in biotechnology?
Bradley: I have not really been following the Indian biotechnology industry so cannot really comment on it. But I can say you cannot become strong in biotech unless there is good research base in basic biology. There is a lot of collaboration between India and UK, which is on at the academic level. Indian scientists are the biggest beneficiary of the Wellcome Trust Foundation. I do not have the exact figures but the funding runs into millions of pounds. We have quite a number of Indian research scholars in the UK. However, the situation is not the same other way round.

Lovell-Badge: We need to explore the areas of collaboration. There is lot of enthusiasm among Indian scientists. It would be nice to know the areas where we can work together.

Can you think of any project India can collaborate on?
Bradley: As the UK has more resources in the R&D, I see more of India coming to the UK than the other way round. It is not possible to move the research equipment here in India. Human genetics is an area where India has a very diverse gene pool

and can be of much help. But India's policy of DNA samples not leaving the country is not helping the scientific community. However, we need to explore areas we can work together. For example, there are companies in China, where we can get sequencing done and it is cost effective. I am not aware if that kind of collaboration is possible in India. Research as such is very costly in the UK. Then we also work on tropical diseases. We can do something in that area, perhaps.

What has been your experience in the human genome project?
Bradley: I inherited the project so the hard work was already done by the time I came on scene. I just took it further. Now, the challenge is a breakthrough in classifying the function of genes. Scientists all over the world are working at it.

Lovell-Badge: It is not easy. I have been working on a single gene for the last 14 years and am not close to determining all the functions of the gene.

What is the status of the stem cell research globally?
Lovell-Badge: There has been a lot of hype surrounding the stem cell research. There are different types of stem cells and work is going on a variety of adult and embryonic stem cells. In fact, the pace has been accelerated in the past few years. The UK has been a bit slow in research in embryonic stem cells because we wanted proper regulations in place. World over a lot of work is on and the applications are nothing short of miraculous. It will find widespread use in drug discovery process for e.g., say toxicity tests.

--Nandita Singh, (CyberMedia News)