About the Conference

Join scientists, academics, researchers, and officials from research institutions, universities, government departments and ministries, and the private sector at the 7th Annual South Asia Biosafety Conference (SABC2019) in Dhaka, Bangladesh on September 14-16, 2019. The premier biosafety meeting in South Asia, SABC2019 is organized under the auspices of the South Asia Biosafety Program by the ILSI Research Foundation and Biotech Consortium India Limited. Registration is now open, and the provisional agenda may be viewed on the conference website: [http://sabc.biotech.co.in](http://sabc.biotech.co.in).

Call for Abstracts

Conference attendees are invited to participate in this year’s program by submitting an abstract for Plenary Session III, IV, V, or VII, the Lightning Round, or for the Poster Program.

**Deadline: August 2, 2019**

Plenary Sessions

Abstracts for consideration in a plenary session should describe research directly relevant to the session topic. This year, sessions open to participation by selected SABC2019 attendees include:

- **Plenary Session III: Rationalizing Risk Assessment and Regulation of Low Risk Activities**
- **Plenary Session IV: Biotechnology Research and Development in South Asia**
- **Plenary Session V: Planning and Permitting Field Trials for Novel Organisms**
- **Plenary Session VII: Public Sector GE Crop Development and Deployment**

Lightning Round

The Lightning Round is a unique opportunity for students and early career researchers to share their research in an oral presentation format that is exciting, challenging, and entertaining. All presentations must convey relevance to biosafety research, environmental or food safety assessment of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), or the regulation of GM plants, animals, arthropods, or micro-organisms. Each participant will be given five minutes and five slides to clearly present their work, challenging them to think carefully about how best to use the allotted time and visual aids. Prizes will be awarded to the top two participants.

Poster Program

Presenting a poster at SABC2019 is a noteworthy way to share expertise or accomplishment, and poster presenters will have a dedicated time to present and discuss their work with the diverse group of attendees. All posters must convey relevance to biosafety research, environmental or food safety assessment of GMOs, or the regulation of GM plants, animals, arthropods, or micro-organisms. All posters accepted to the Poster Program will be eligible for the Poster Competition and judged based on the guidelines detailed on the SABC2019 website. Prizes will be awarded to the top two participants.

How to Submit

Abstracts may be submitted online via the SABC2019 website at: [http://sabc.biotech.co.in](http://sabc.biotech.co.in)

In order to participate, attendees MUST register for the conference and pay the registration fee once notified of their acceptance.
Harmonization of Biosafety Framework in South Asian Countries: A Perspective

Dr. M.A. Yousuf Akhond, Biotechnology Division, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute

Over the last couple of years, South Asian conferences and meetings on biotechnology and biosafety have become instrumental in bringing biotechnology and biosafety professionals in the region together on a single platform. The recent Regional Expert Consultation Meeting on the Progress and Prospects of Agricultural Biotechnology and Biosafety in South Asia was no exception. The meeting was held on June 18-20, 2019, in a Dhaka hotel and was jointly organized by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Agriculture Centre (SAC), Dhaka, Bangladesh, ILSI Research Foundation, Washington, DC, USA, and the South Asia Biosafety Program (SABP).

The joint sponsorship offered by SAC showed the importance the organization placed on issues relating to biotechnology and biosafety in the SAARC region.

Most of the South Asian countries, including those under SAARC, are deeply connected by a long heritage of shared culture and livelihood. The economic development of the countries is also connected and dependent to a large extent on the developments in agriculture. With the looming threat of a changing climate, the farmers of this region are facing serious and interconnected challenges, including the constant threat of pests and diseases, increasingly severe consequences of global warming, other forms of environmental degradation and land use changes, which do not follow political boundaries. These challenges will require innovations in agricultural technology, including the development, deployment, and adoption of modern biotechnology, as well as the relevant policy reforms to accommodate changes brought about by the new technologies.

Going back several years, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which came into force on December 29, 1993, clearly recognized the potential of modern biotechnology, and consequently sought to ensure that these technologies are developed with appropriate oversight, to safeguard biodiversity by its conservation and sustainable use. In 2000, to advance this goal and to provide a clear pathway for the safe development and deployment of biotechnology, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB) to the CBD was finalized. Thus far, 171 countries, including the SAARC countries have ratified or acceded.

With the looming threat of a changing climate, the farmers of this region are facing serious and interconnected challenges.

Participants at the SAARC Regional Expert Consultation Meeting (June 18, 2019).

Continued on page 3
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Considering the commonalities of livelihood, as well as the problems faced by the 2 billion people living in the SAARC region, it was felt that concerted efforts are required by scientists, agriculturalists, and policy makers to develop and deploy adaptive strategies to meet the upcoming needs of South Asia’s farmers.

It was evident from the presentations delivered by the participants from the SAARC countries that all the countries have already developed their own system of regulating the development and deployment of biotech crops. India and Pakistan have a long history of growing Bt cotton. Bangladesh has joined the club by releasing Bt eggplant for cultivation, having developed its own comprehensive biosafety regime beforehand. There are several areas common to these three countries’ biosafety regulatory policies and hence, a little effort will be required to harmonize the system. The outcome of such harmonization will be greatly beneficial in reducing the time and effort for the development and deployment of future biotech crops, especially during urgent situations, such as the introduction of wheat blast disease or the fall armyworm.

Representatives of countries like Sri Lanka and Nepal, who have yet to catch up on the technologies, showed great interest in learning from their neighbors’ experiences and were happy to have the opportunity to directly interact with their South Asian colleagues. Harmonization of the policies might benefit these countries, and as such, an initiative will save a lot of time, money, and effort on their part, if and when they decide to adopt the products of modern biotechnology.

Bhutan’s stand on not developing or introducing biotech crops for growing on their own soil at the moment but allowing the introduction or import of products derived from biotech crops for food, feed, and processing was interesting but quite logical from their perspective. However, the delegate was keen to know what their neighboring countries are thinking and doing. A greater understanding on the issues discussed in the meeting will surely help them with their future decisions and harmonization efforts.

Some of the participants, quite rightly, also emphasized the need for harmonization within the countries themselves, among different
Focus on South Asian Cooperation to Ensure Regulation for GE Crops

Reproduced with permission from The Financial Express, as published on June 21, 2019 (Vol. 26, No. 214)

Experts at a meeting on Tuesday highly focused on regional cooperation among the South Asian countries to ensure biosafety and regulation for genetically engineered (GE) crops. The SAARC Regional Expert Consultation Meeting on the Progress and Prospects of Agricultural Biotechnology and Biosafety in South Asia was held at a city hotel. The SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC), Dhaka, Bangladesh, South Asia Biosafety Program (SABP), Bangladesh, and the ILSI Research Foundation, USA jointly organized the event.

Speaking at the inauguration of the three-day program as the chief guest, Additional Secretary of the Agriculture Ministry (research wing), Kamalaranjan Das, said the country is now highly focusing on the safe and nutrition-rich food. He said incessant use of pesticide, followed by outbreak of many diseases, is a common problem now in traditional farming practices. The scientist, and concerned researchers of the government research organizations should make a way forward to ensure safe food for people, he added. Close coordination, cooperation and knowledge sharing among the SAARC countries regarding biotechnology and biosafety could mutually benefit all the countries in the region, he said.

Senior Food Security and Agricultural Policy Advisor of USAID, Dr. M Shahidur Rahman Bhuiyan, said agriculture is facing serious and interconnected challenges, including the constant threat of pests and diseases, increasingly severe consequences of climate change, other forms of environmental degradation, and land use changes. He said that these challenges will require concerted efforts by scientists, agriculturalists, and policy makers to develop and deploy adaptive strategies to meet the needs of South Asia’s farmers. He said innovations in agriculture, including the development and deployment of modern biotechnology, are essential to the success of these efforts.

Dr. Pradyumna Raj Pandey, Senior Program Specialist (crops) at SAARC Agriculture Centre, Dhaka, in his welcome address, said agriculture is increasingly a global enterprise, with the movement of produce, seeds, and commodities among the countries. This is providing an essential mechanism to ensure access to adequate food and nutrition, he said, adding that agricultural biotechnology can contribute to achieving food and nutritional security in an increasing trend in global trade. And for that, harmonization of the biosafety rules and regulation among the SAARC countries is needed, he said.

SABP Country Manager, Dr. Aparna Islam, said the consultation meeting aims to share information on the current status of agricultural biotechnology and biosafety regulations in South Asian countries. The program is expected to explore mechanisms to promote harmonization, including a regional biosafety platform, she mentioned.

“We will also identify areas where SAARC countries can adopt harmonized policies that will provide benefit to farmers and consumers through access to food and technologies,” she added.

Deputy Executive Director of ILSI Research Foundation, Dr. Andrew F. Roberts, presented the keynote paper titled Global Status and Need of Harmonization Biotechnology and Biosafety Framework at the inauguration. Biotechnology and agricultural experts from SAARC nations like Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh are participating in the consultation meeting. Senior Program Specialist of SAARC Agriculture Centre (livestock), Dr. Ashis Kumar Samanta, coordinated the inauguration of the program.
Regional Workshop on Harmonization of Biosafety Regulatory Systems of South and Southeast Asia

Mr. Mohammed Solaiman Haider, Department of Environment, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bangladesh

The Workshop on Regional Harmonization of Biosafety Regulatory System was held on May 4-5, 2019 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The workshop was organized by the Department of Environment, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to enhance the capacity of the country to implement the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The workshop was an integral part of the implementation project supported by the UN Environment Program and Global Environment Facility (UNEP-GEF). Biosafety Expert Officials from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Philippines, and Vietnam participated in the workshop. The workshop discussed and consolidated the issues of harmonization of biosafety regulatory systems among the countries of the South and Southeast Asian regions.

The opening session of the workshop was graced by the Chief Guest, Mr. MD Shahabuddin MP, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. Mr. Abdullah Al Mohsin Chowdhury, respected Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh was the Special Guest. Country participants from the South and Southeast Asian regions presented developments in terms of the biosafety regulation system in their respective countries and also pointed out the areas of regional harmonization. At the end of the two days, delegates recommended that a regional mechanism of exchanging information on biosafety regulations, risk assessment, and risk management should be created, which would enable countries to interact with each other. In this regard, development of a regional Biosafety Clearing House (BCH) was recommended. In addition, capacity building on biosafety risk assessment and management was recommended to strengthen the capabilities of the countries in the region.
## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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<td>7th Annual South Asia Biosafety Conference</td>
<td>South Asia Biosafety Program (SABP), ILSI Research Foundation, and Biotech Consortium India Limited (BCIL)</td>
<td>September 14-16, 2019 Dhaka</td>
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### BANGLADESH

- **International Conference on Plant Protection in Horticulture – Advances and Challenges**
  - Organized by: Association for Advancement of Pest Management in Horticultural Ecosystems; ICAR-Indian Institute of Horticultural Research, Bengaluru; National Institute of Plant Health Management, Hyderabad; Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi
  - Date: July 24-27, 2019
  - Location: Bengaluru
  - Website: [https://www.a-pba.org](https://www.a-pba.org)

- **3rd Annual AgriBiotech India Summit 2019**
  - Organized by: Inventicon Business Intelligence
  - Date: July 25-26, 2019
  - Location: Hyderabad
  - Website: [https://agribiotechnindia.com](https://agribiotechnindia.com)

- **Seed World 2019**
  - Organized by: Indian Council of Food and Agriculture
  - Date: September 4-7, 2019
  - Location: Bengaluru
  - Website: [http://icfa.org.in/event.php](http://icfa.org.in/event.php)

### INDIA

- **3rd Annual AgriBiotech India Summit 2019**
  - Organized by: Inventicon Business Intelligence
  - Date: July 25-26, 2019
  - Location: Hyderabad
  - Website: [https://agribiotechnindia.com](https://agribiotechnindia.com)

- **2nd International Conference on Recent Advances in Agricultural, Environmental & Applied Sciences for Global Development**
  - Organized by: Agro Environmental Development Society (AEDS) and Dr. Y. S. Parmar University of Horticulure & Forestry
  - Date: September 27-29, 2019
  - Location: Nauni, Solan, Himachal Pradesh
  - Website: [http://www.yspuniversity.ac.in/trainings/Conference_Brochure__Solan.pdf](http://www.yspuniversity.ac.in/trainings/Conference_Brochure__Solan.pdf)

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### INTERNATIONAL

- **6th Plant Genomics and Gene Editing Congress**
  - Organized by: University of Nottingham and Crops for the Future
  - Date: July 29-30, 2019
  - Location: Kulala Lumpur, Malaysia

- **Course: Basic Laboratory Training on GMO Analysis**
  - Organized by: International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB) and National Biotechnology Development Agency, Abuja, Nigeria
  - Date: September 15-21, 2019
  - Location: Abuja, Nigeria
  - Website: [https://www.icgeb.org/courses/course-basic-laboratory-training-on-gmo-analysis/](https://www.icgeb.org/courses/course-basic-laboratory-training-on-gmo-analysis/)

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**The South Asia Biosafety Program (SABP)** is an international developmental program implemented in India and Bangladesh with support from the United States Agency for International Development. SABP aims to work with national governmental agencies and other public sector partners to facilitate the implementation of transparent, efficient, and responsive regulatory frameworks for products of modern biotechnology that meet national goals as regards the safety of novel foods and feeds, and environmental protection.

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