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"Maharashtra is the first to look at clinical trials"

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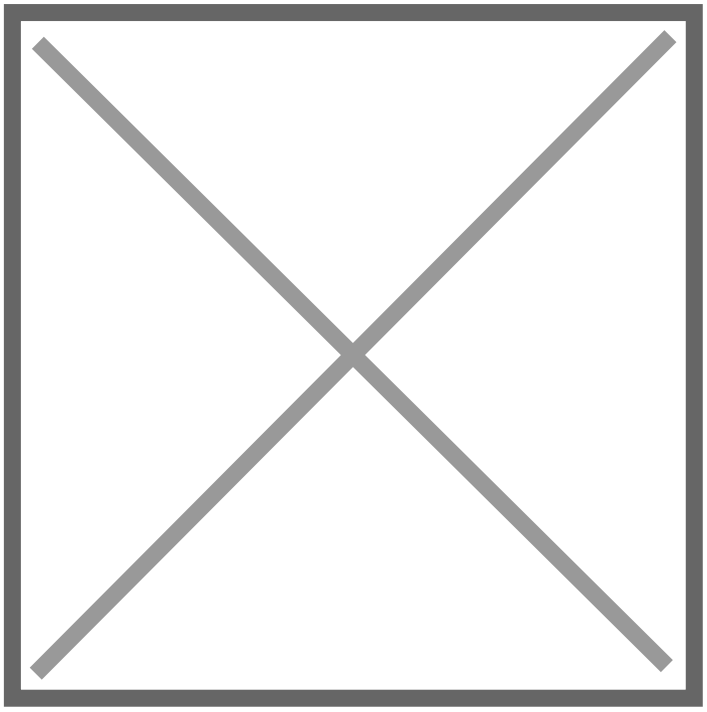
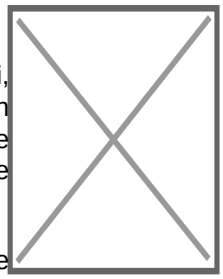


What are the infrastructure facilities being provided to the biotech industry in Maharashtra?



The government has signed up with the Chatterjee Group to develop, promote and market the Hinjawadi, Pune, biotech park. The group will focus on facilities required for start-ups and existing companies, which want to improve the manufacturing efficiency of their biotech products. Further, we want to leverage the information technology strength to create a platform for bioinformatics at Pune. Like biopharma the scope and opportunity for the bioinformatics sector is huge.

We see great scope in agribiotechnology. Maharashtra is known for its horticulture sector. To promote agribiotechnology in Jalna, Aurangabad, we have appointed Mahyco, which has excellent research facilities and was the first to launch Bt cotton in India.

What are the promotional activities initiated the government?

Biotechnology will evolve only through intellectual capital and strong human resource. We are improving the curriculum for biotechnology right from the school level and creating a greater awareness about the subject, career options and providing the right kind of the content to the industry. The University of Pune has been developed as the center of excellence with all the modern facilities. Apart from creating the good curriculum, it is closely collaborating with the industry.

Further, the state government in association with CII is organizing MahabioYatra regularly every month. This is a brainstorming session for the intellectuals, industry, scientists and others. Intellectual activity takes place at the meetings, which will evolve some kind of business and also create awareness about the latest happenings in biotech world.

Besides agri and pharma, which are the other areas you want to focus on?

Maharashtra is the first state to look at clinical trials. The state has a vast infrastructure facility in public health sector, with over 1.2 lakh patients visiting the civil hospitals on a daily basis. We are working with the health department and pharmaceutical companies to take up clinical trails in a big way. We have all the necessary resources. We also have to focus on genetics. Today it is a cost to the state. But looking at the future we can convert this into a revenue model.

The Government of India has introduced guidelines for conducting clinical trials in the country. The Biotech Commission of Maharashtra, in consultation with the pharmaceutical industry, has worked on the same and finalized the guidelines for the state. The pharmaceutical companies are discussing with the health department in this regard. This is an innovative area the state is looking at.

Though companies are looking at the private hospitals for clinical trials but their client base is very small. At the public hospitals, we can provide them with a list of patients and a huge database to carry out the trials. As per the guidelines finalized by the Biotechnology Commission, the public hospitals would maintain privacy and follow ethical guidelines while carrying out the trials. We are also looking at providing facilities to carry out clinical trials on animals so that the pharma companies need not look at other sources for their new molecules. Companies like Wockhardt, Nicholas Piramal, Glaxo and Lupin are investing in biotechnology.

Is the state providing financial aid to new entrepreneurs?

The state has a budget proposal of Rs 10 crore for new ventures in biotechnology sector. We have already invited proposals from entrepreneurs for setting up biotech companies in the state. We are scrutinizing the proposals, so that the state support reaches the right entrepreneur.

Though Maharashtra is a major sugarcane producing state in the country, why is the biofuel sector still in a nascent stage?

The market for biofuel in India is still in a nascent stage. The Government of India has to create a proper market for it. Today blending of five percent ethanol with petrol is limited. Companies are discussing with Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petroleum to use more ethanol blended petrol in the country.

Narayan Kulkarni