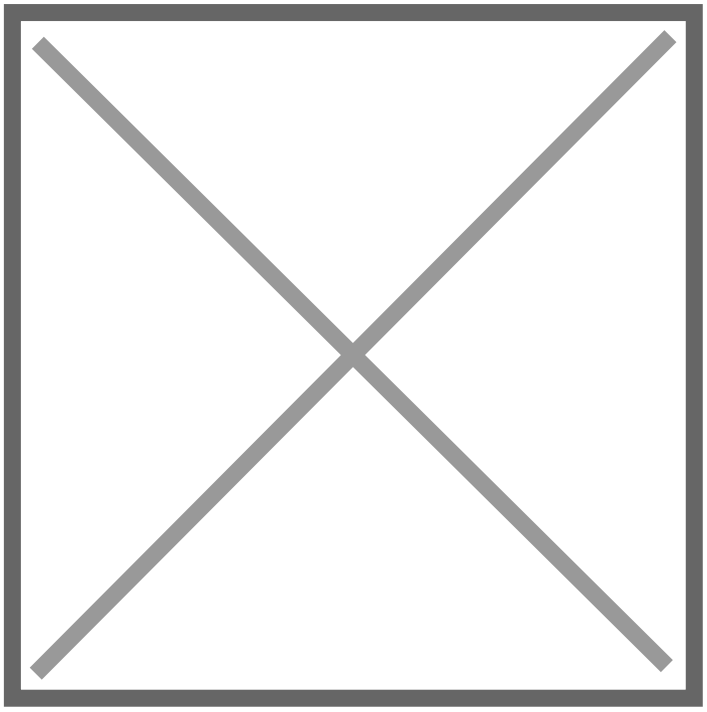
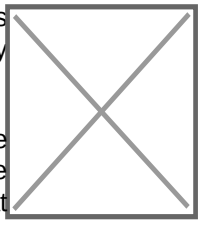
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Biotechnology in India is no longer confined to research laboratories and is now alive and kicking as a Rs 1,830 crore industry, remarked a write-up in the venerable The Hindu about the BioSpectrum-ABLE industry survey. That sums up the current status and the rosy future that lies ahead of the biotechnology industry.

This optimism has been reinforced by the country's topmost biotech policy maker, Dr Manju Sharma. While responding to BioSpectrum's July cover story on "The Top 10 Hurdles Facing the Biotech Industry", the secretary of the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) has struck an optimistic note. She was confident that most of the hurdles would not remain as roadblocks for long and the industry could look forward to a bright future in five years. Dr Sharma has been guiding the growth of this industry for nearly a decade.

She has rightly pointed out the major initiatives and support provided by the government to accelerate the growth of biotech. The DBT chief has been repeatedly stressing the importance of equal levels of commitment and risk-taking by biotech entrepreneurs too.

Three other major developments which have taken place in different states reinforce the faith in the prospects of the industry. In August, the Kerala government has announced a forward-looking biotechnology policy to leverage the state's strengths in the phytopharmaceuticals and related areas. Kerala has also roped in a biotech hotshop Avesthagen as a partner to develop this sector quickly.

In September, another southern state, Andhra Pradesh, reasserted its primacy in the biotech arena by showcasing its strengths at a major four-day event in Hyderabad. The country's first biotechnology fund, floated by the state government has also taken off with a bang, announcing three major investments. To consolidate the gains, the state plans to entice biotech investors from all over Asia by organizing another big event in Hyderabad next February.

The third heartening development is the choice of biotechnology as one of the major segment to attract investors by the western state of Gujarat. The country's second most industrialized state after Maharashtra is keen to ensure that it does not miss the biotech bus. It doesn't want to repeat its mistake in ignoring the booming information technology sector. There are indications that Chief Minister Narendra Modi will pull out all stops to tap the entrepreneurial spirit of Gujaratis all over the world in biotechnology.

It is clear from these different initiatives that promotion of biotechnology need not any longer be the burden of the Central government which has carried this since 1986 at least. Dr Manju Sharma can breathe easy. With more enthusiasts in states, biotechnology could benefit from the increased attention it will get from the nation's political and bureaucratic leadership. Yet another indication is the Maharashtra government's decision to celebrate former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's birth anniversary on November 14 as the "Biotechnology Day". The event had started last year but the scale and scope will

increase this year, perhaps in keeping with the increasing importance of biotechnology. We couldn't have asked for more.

