

Looming Talent Crunch

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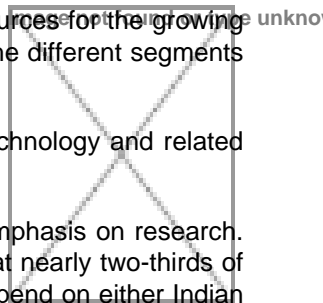
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Industry leaders have been talking about the demand-supply mismatch in the availability of human resources for the growing biotech for some time now. The numbers are there but they do not match the specific requirements of the different segments of the industry.

The last issue of BioSpectrum ranked the Top 20 private and publicly-funded institutions offering biotechnology and related courses in the country. Their numbers are growing and there are at least 300 top notch institutions.

Then why is the industry still talking about the talent crunch? Biotechnology has always had a lot of emphasis on research. And the latest survey by BioSpectrum, using the data collected in the last six months clearly indicate that nearly two-thirds of the students coming out of these institutions head abroad for doctoral studies. So the industry has to depend on either Indian professionals working abroad to handle top research jobs. Or as many companies are doing, hire even foreign professionals to take up key positions in their organizations at the early stage of the evolution of the enterprises.

Other knowledge industries are also facing a shortage of talent. So one is not sure whether biotechnology is part of the larger talent crunch facing an economy growing at over 8 percent consistently. As a nation, we have not prepared ourselves in many sectors to face such talent crunch. The national economy is making that transition to a high growth path, and like every other industrial sector, biotechnology too should be prepared to anticipate its needs much better.



The recent issue of Outlook Business magazine highlighted the Indian industry's unlisted leaders. And Serum Institute of India, the No.1 biotech company according to the 4th BioSpectrum-ABLE Biotech Industry Survey 2006, found a prominent mention in the articles. The mainstream media too has started to give more attention to the biotech industry and this is a good sign.

Biotechnology continues to hold considerable interest among the nation's top decision makers. And there is no better proof than the Padma Bhushan title, the nation's third highest civilian award conferred on Dr Manju Sharma, the former head of the Department of Biotechnology. BioSpectrum and the industry recognized her contributions in promoting the growth of this sector in the same year she retired from the government.

The country has also recognized the efforts of Prof Ananda M Chakrabarty, the India-born, American citizen who got the world's first patent for a modified microorganism way back in 1981.

The government while announcing these awards could do full justice to the awardees by publicizing the major contributions of the awardees. The bland announcements on the eve of the Republic Day every year does not do justice to the immense contributions made by many of the recipients. Also, the criteria used by the selection process and a greater transparency about the awards process will only enhance its appeal. Currently, the mass media highlights the names of a few popular awardees and it is left to many of the individuals or their organizations to indirectly blow the trumpet on these awardees.

Meanwhile, India's biotech sector is getting ready to showcase its capabilities at the forthcoming BIO event in Boston in May. The DBT has taken the lead to bring all Indian participants under the single banner of India Pavilion, coordinated by the CII. More promising Indian companies and research institutions should participate in the Boston event. Countries like Singapore underwrite a major part of the promotional efforts to showcase the companies based in events like BIO Boston. The DBT and CII too should take steps to rope in more Indian companies by providing all necessary support in terms of infrastructure and financial resources. It will help the industry and the nation in the long run immensely.

<sureshn@cybermedia.co.in>