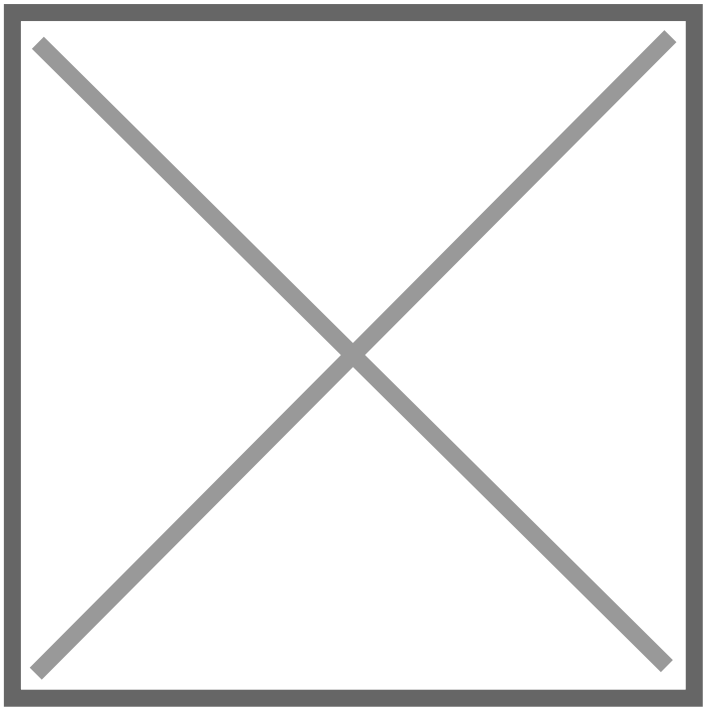
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DBT team taps industry for project plans

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Implementing NBDS

It was in the March 2003 inaugural issue of BioSpectrum that the need to formulate a national biotech policy was highlighted. Dr MK Bhan, secretary, DBT, and the union minister for science and technology, Kapil Sibal, who took charge in 2004, recognized the importance of biotechnology in India and took the onus of developing an industry-friendly policy.

On October 21, 2004, when Sibal met biotech CEOs in Bangalore, who came together under the Association of Biotechnology-Led Entrepreneurs (ABLE), he said that a national biotech policy would be in place by January 2005 that would comply with the global regime on intellectual property rights and be a quadrilateral agreement between the academia, industry, laboratories and the state, addressing the procedural issues. Though, the Indian government approved the National Biotech Policy (National Biotechnology Development Strategy) in late 2007, the streamlining of various regulatory issues started much before.

Policy highlights

BIPP (Biotechnology Industry Partnership Program)

Fuelling innovation and entering new territories to build IPR

The program caters the need to generate IPR in advanced technology areas. Early product development is not expected in these areas because these will be radically new fields like stem cell therapy and nanoscience. "The idea is to enter the advanced technology area when its potential is uncertain rather than when the potential is established"' explained Dr Bhan.

BIRAC
Funding innovation

Promotion of R&D is another priority under the strategy for which the government is investing in a new organization, BIRAC. According to Dr Bhan, "The Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance council (BIRAC) will manage SBIRI and BIPP. In addition to that it will provide patenting services, technology transfer services and in turn fund innovation. This is just like every country has a science organization and an innovation organization where the latter funds the former to generate interesting innovation projects. Hence BIRAC will serve as the funding agency for the industry and charge some royalty for the investment." BIRAC as an organization will be available to service the industry with analysis, technology forecasting, IPR generation.

Exploring shared facilities
Creating joint research chairs

This will help the DBT to explore the space of shared facilities more so in the area of expensive shared facilities-toxicology centers, animal facilities, transgenics, jointly managed technology incubators amongst others. "We have been working on a scheme for joint chairs, where such not for profit research foundations can take more risks and we would fund them as if they were public sector. However, the research foundation and the industry should have a relationship wherein if the foundation produces some technology which is transferred to the main company, some royalty is also given to the foundation to mobilize its research goal," added Dr Bhan.

Public-private partnership
Need to come up with novel ideas to work upon

BIRAC aims at creating more novel and interesting public private partnership models. The DBT has joined hands with FICCI on the lines of the European technology program called the industry partnership platform as a part of it commitment to public-private partnership, which according to the policy would attract an investment of 30 percent of the DBT's budget. Dr Bhan believes that for this to be a successful industry, it will have to come up with novel ideas on the areas where they need help to be able to do more innovation.

Nurturing human capital
Increase in the density of scientist pool

1. Reversing brain drain

In light of the small pool of scientists in India as compared to the country's population, the policy takes into account the expansion of PhDs by the introduction of a new partnership scheme with Wellcome Trust under the NBDS.

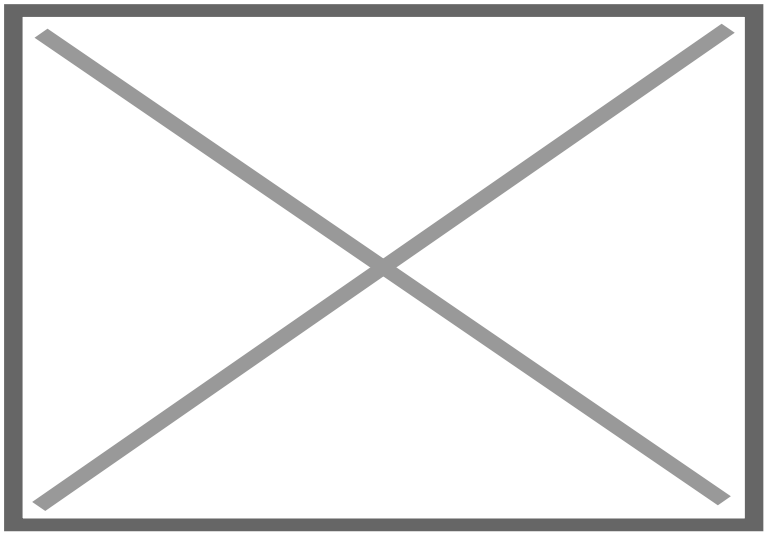
2. Fillip to university life science departments

The policy aims to give grants to life sciences departments of key universities to scale up their capacity in terms of faculty size, labs, representation in disciplines to run a hugely expanded PhD program. The scheme will select 20 best universities in the country and give a major lift to their life sciences department.

3.Setting up of new universities

Eight DBT institutes are to come up that will produce a faculty of 400, that in turn will produce four times the number of Phds, i.e. 1,600. These institutes will not be pure biology institutes but inter-disciplinary units and will have strong translation potential while preserving basic science

DBT team taps industry for project plans



On February 19, 2008, the key team from the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Government of India, met the industry leaders from all over the country in Bangalore, to seek ideas to implement the National Biotech Development Strategy. This one-day event was organized by BioSpectrum in association with the DBT and ABLE. Dr MK Bhan, secretary, DBT, Dr S Natesh, senior advisor, and KP Pandian, joint secretary and financial adviser, DBT, spent the whole day with over 70 key personnel from the industry and academia. Dr Shrikumar Suryanarayan, director general, ABLE, BioSpectrum Group Editor, N Suresh, moderated the day-long proceedings. Over 70 people from Bangalore, Mumbai, Delhi, Trivandrum, Hyderabad, Chennai and Ahmedabad shared their views on catalyzing the growth of the biotech industry.

Some ideas that popped up during the discussion include:

- 6-8 players can come together and work for GMP training and utilize the pilot plants.
- Incentive for Indian companies and institutes to make it affordable to make the existing facilities accessible
- Creating 4-5 shared and accredited facilities which can be supported by the DBT under the BIRAC mecnism.
  The idea is to identify the gaps in the technology process and Centers of Excellence (CoEs) be set up in the areas of protein characterization and production, bioanalytical /biologicals, and carbohydrate analysis. Invest in scientists with the help of the DBT. Industry should take the lead in partnering.
- Explore public-private partnerships in medicinal plants and create documents/dossiers.
- Build a pool of people in toxicology studies, incubation centers for animal biotech, food policy research, etc.
- Training for teachers