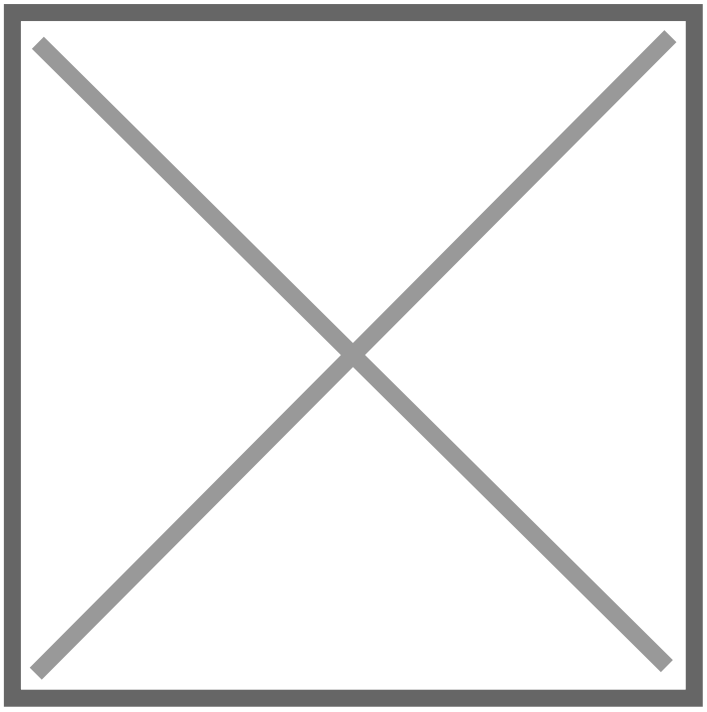
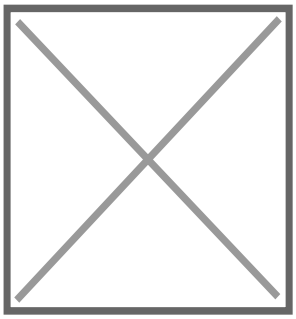
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Getting the biotech buzz back

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Sometimes hype can harm an industry. India's fledgling biotechnology industry is at the receiving end of some unnecessary hype being built around it. The strange thing is that the hype about biotech is not created by the industry itself but by those outside it.

The latest hype about biotech has come from a national newspaper DNA. In a recent edition, the newspaper has started an India Positive campaign. The second sentence in the screaming copy on the front page, while listing various positive things in the country, is... Ã¢â?¬Å?India's biotechnology industry has annual revenues in excess of $5 billion and is second only to the US industry.Ã¢â?¬? Biotech industry leaders will be very happy if the reality is this. But it is not. The most authentic survey of the Indian biotech industry is done by BioSpectrum and ABLE. The $5 billion revenue figure is at least two more years away. Unless of course one counts the entire biotech ecosystem and its revenue contribution, this figure is way off the mark. There are certainly other biotech markets in the world that are bigger than India, such as Australia, Japan, China, UK and Germany.

The industry does not need this unwanted attention at this stage. Because, the hype will focus attention away from the urgent steps required to put the industry on an even keel and help it realize its strengths in the long run.

So are things beginning to happen in the biotech sector? The answer is certainly yes, but not on the imagined high scales. It has become clear over the years that budding entrepreneurs in biotech have to earn their spurs with their fund raising abilities and not depend on venture capitalists who continue to shun risky investments. However, various schemes such as SBIRI of the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) have filled the gap admirably, in a very short time.

In the recent issues, BioSpectrum has showcased some of the excellent examples of biotech developments spurred by public-private partnership (PPP) models. The series continues in this issue with three more interesting profiles of companies forging ahead with SBIRI funds.

Hyderabad-based ExCel Matrix is a tissue engineering company focused on commercializing some of the regenerative medicine techniques developed by the publicly funded National Institute of Immunology(NII). Imgenex India, based in Orissa is using the tools of nanotechnology to ensure targeted delivery of drugs to treat osteoporosis. And Delhi-based ARA Healthcare has used public funds effectively to develop three therapeutic proteins to fighter cancer cells. The country needs many more such initiatives. If many of these partnership efforts succeed, it will indeed bring the buzz back to biotech.

Meanwhile, the genetically modified (GM) products under development continue to generate considerable attention in different parts of the country. After cotton and brinjal, it is the GM rubber that is generating heat even before the onset of summer.

It is time for well meaning scientists and even policy makers to come out in the open and create public awareness about the

benefits of GM technologies.

With this edition, BioSpectrum completes eight years of showcasing the business of Indian biotech. Log on to www.biospectrumindia.com/subscribe.asp and avail the benefits for uninterrupted reading.



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