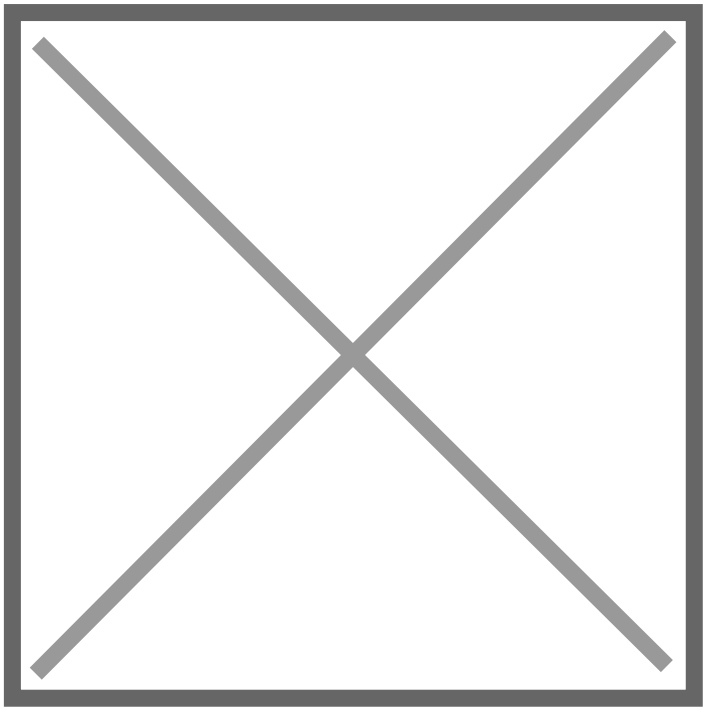
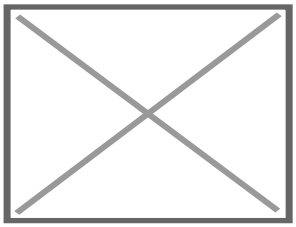
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Winning the race

23 July 2003 | News





In the Knowledge Economy, US is the undisputed leader. So it is no surprise that in biotechnology too, America leads the world. And the rest of the world tries to catch up with the US. Who will be the closest competitor to the US in biotechnology?

There are 17 nations vying for the second spot in biotechnology. They are: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Singapore, Sweden, Taiwan and the UK. A Washington DC-based consultancy organization, New Economy Strategies, has painstakingly profiled the efforts of these 17 significant biotech clusters in a report "The Scan of International Life Science Clusters and Activities".

By now, it is clear that India is not included in this list. But can India join this list? Certainly, yes. It can happen when the biotechnology companies, research institutions, funding agencies and the government work collectively towards this goal. Even in these days of economic liberalization, when the government is trying to get out of various sectors, there is a strong case for it to support biotechnology in a big way. For, this will not be an exception. These 17 countries have been supported heavily by the their governments in a big way. The government efforts in these 17 countries are clearly focused on ensuring that the national agenda concentrates on collaborative research programs, public-private partnerships and support to the commercialization of newly developed technologies.

For India too, there are lessons to be learnt from the experiences of the other biotech leaders. The problems faced by the biotechnology sector in India are almost the same as that in other countries. Most of the companies are small, private and unprofitable. Seed funds are not available and complex regulatory processes are hampering innovations. There also exists resistance to the government research centers and academics collaborating with private companies. The Cover Story of this issue has highlighted 10 hurdles in the path of progress of the national biotechnology sector.

Some of our enlightened policy makers are aware of these issues. They have been grappling with these for some years now and are trying to cut through them to make it easy for the biotech industry. But more efforts are needed. A well articulated national policy on biotechnology should be the starting point. And reiteration of the national commitment to the sector should help. In 15 years, the government has invested approximately $500 million (Rs 2,500 crore) in the biotech sector. Ireland, a country many times smaller than India in size and economy, plans to invest over $500 million in biotech in the next few years.

There is no doubt anywhere in the world that biotech will be a key driver of the economy in the coming years. Let India too join the biotech bandwagon at least as the 18th player without losing any more time and aim to leave all others behind, drawing on every ounce of our national talent.

