

"I want AP to be No.1 in biotech"

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From the bulk drug capital to a happening biotech destination. This transformation has been catalyzed by the plans, policies and activities initiated by the AP state government under the visionary leadership of the Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, who has nurtured biotech into a booming opportunity in the state. BioSpectrum spoke to Naidu about his plans to boost the biotech industry of the state. Excerpts:

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Andhra Pradesh with reference to the biotech/life sciences sector?

My vision for Andhra Pradesh with reference to biotech and life sciences sector is that a common man should get the benefits of new technologies emerging in these fields. My vision is to provide a disease-free and healthy society by using modern technologies and we are working towards that. For instance, we are establishing International Institute of Life Sciences in Hyderabad, involving the leading biotech and life sciences industries in the State. We are developing centers-of-excellence in different branches of biotechnology viz. for agri and veterinary biotechnology in Acharya NG Ranga University, an agribiotech incubator in ICRISAT, a marine resource development center in association with Andhra Pradesh University and a pharma biotech hub in SP Biotech Park and ICICI Knowledge Park in Genome Valley near Hyderabad. Through such initiatives, we envision developing the state of AP into a biotechnology state of the country.

What are the short term and long term strategies to make AP a leader in biotechnology?

Andhra Pradesh is the first state in the country to have an exclusive policy for biotechnology in the year 2001. We have announced the policy framework and clear strategies have been worked out. The short term strategies are projecting the

strengths of the state, especially the locational advantage of Hyderabad, the strong presence of world class research institutes like CCMB, CDFD and IICT, the availability of a strong pool of trained and scientific manpower, the recently developed ICICI Knowledge Park and SP Biotech Park and a proactive and environment friendly government policy.

Among the other strategies to make AP a leader in biotechnology, we have created a brand name called "Genome Valley" and it is widely popular all over the world. We are setting up standards with world class infrastructure and a long term policy for making AP the #1 destination for investments from all over the world. We have created an enabling environment for establishing the biotech industry. We have a single window clearance system for hassle free licensing and approvals. We participate in the international and national exhibitions, conferences and demonstrate our strengths and invite foreign participation and collaboration into Andhra Pradesh. We are liberalizing the labor laws to match the requirements of the industry.

Has the State Government identified specific sectors to leverage the existing strengths in AP and leapfrog in biotech?

The AP government has been encouraging pharma and biotech sectors to leverage the existing strengths in AP. Vaccines and recombinant DNA products in health care, nutraceuticals and medicinal plant formulations are some of the areas that have been identified as key sectors for growth and long-term development. This apart, contract research and clinical trials also have good promise.

What are the Government's plans to provide the latest infrastructure and incubator facilities to biotech entrepreneurs?

The Government of Andhra Pradesh has special plans to provide the latest infrastructure in the form of uninterrupted water and electricity supplies to the Biotech and Knowledge Parks. A dedicated sub-station has been erected in the Genome Valley for uninterrupted electricity. Fast track roads have been laid connecting the Genome Valley to other parts of the city. India's first biotech incubator has been established in SP Biotech Park in Genome Valley with an outlay of Rs 22.50 crore in association with DBT and IICT. The incubator offers the latest state-of-the-art facilities for start-up and existing biotech companies and entrepreneurs to try out their new technologies and processes which otherwise would become very difficult to do. The Government is investing huge amounts on all the infrastructure. A National Animal Resource Testing facility is also planned in association with ICMR and National Institutes of Health and an area of 100 acres has been earmarked for this purpose in Genome Valley. An agribiotech incubator is coming up in ICRISAT exclusively for developing new technologies for sustainable agriculture. It will facilitate in producing new crops and varieties for food security and for increasing the nutritional value.

What are the fiscal and other incentives available to potential biotech entrepreneurs in AP?

There are a number of incentives available to potential entrepreneurs in Andhra Pradesh. There is 25 percent capital subsidy in the cost of the land for the biotech parks, and a rebate in the land cost at the rate of Rs 30,000 for every job created in bioinformatics and other related fields in the parks and a concessional sales tax of only 1 percent as against 12-14 percent outside the park areas. The other incentives available to potential biotech entrepreneurs in AP include provision of water supply and power supply up to the doorstep and excellent roads. A residential accommodation proposal for the personnel working in Genome Valley at concessional rate has also been initiated recently. The government has created an IPR facilitation cell for helping companies in their patenting and other aspects as well as a virtual library and documentation center in ICICI Knowledge Park.

What would you like Andhra Pradesh to be related withâ€”meaning what should the recall value of the State be?

I want AP to be #1 in biotech. That is our goal. I think we are marching ahead.