

## Government approves national biotech policy

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The Union minister for science and technology and earth sciences, Kapil Sibal and Dr MK Bhan, secretary, DBT, announcing the national biotech policy.

The much-awaited National Biotechnology Development Strategy has been approved by the Government of India. The strategy is an outcome of a two-year-long nationwide consultation process with multiple stakeholders including ministries concerned, universities, research institutes, private sector, civil society, consumer groups, non-government and voluntary organizations and international bodies. The draft strategy, which was posted on the web, received over 300 comments from all sections of the society.

Announcing this, the Union minister for science and technology and earth sciences, Kapil Sibal, said, "Biotechnology is a sunrise sector which requires focused attention and the government has accorded approval for the broad framework of this strategy and the sectors proposed therein. The strategy, while enabling the full utilization of currently available opportunities in manufacturing and services, will lay a strong foundation for discovery and innovation, effectively utilizing novel technology platforms with potential to contribute to long term benefits in agriculture, animal productivity, human health, environmental security and sustainable industrial growth."

**The key elements of strategy include:**

- A National Biotechnology Regulatory Authority would be set up as an independent, autonomous and professionally led body to provide a single window mechanism for biosafety clearance of genetically modified products and processes.
- A high-powered Inter-ministerial Committee is to be set up under the chairmanship of secretary, DBT, to effectively coordinate the development of the sector by addressing cross cutting issues.
- 30 percent of DBT's Budget to be spent on public-private partnership programs.
- A Biotechnology Industry Partnership Programme (BIPP) for Advanced Technology would be launched
- The existing Small Business Innovation Research Industry (SBIRI) scheme to promote innovation in SMEs has been a success. Approval has been accorded for the expansion of SBIRI during the 11th Plan.
- A Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) is to be launched to act as an interface between academic and private sector, particularly SMEs and startups; nurture and catalyze R&D and innovation in biotechnology in the private sector and promote public-private partnerships.

**In its vision to build world class human capital, the strategy has focused on:**

- Improved and expanded PhD and post-doctoral programs in order to reach the best levels in the Asian region
- Enhanced quality of masters level and undergraduate level education
- Promotion of life sciences and biotechnology at undergraduate and masters levels
- Creation of a translational workforce of high quality to meet short- and mid-term requirements of the country
- Promoting support to institutions for undergraduate education to achieve 'Star College' status.
- A new role visualized for autonomous institutions of DBT to promote excellence in R&D. Selected institutions will be financially empowered for promoting excellence in and translational R&D by supporting 'Research Resource Units' in universities and sister institutions through extramural funding.
- UNESCO Regional Centre for Science, Education and Innovation in Biotechnology being established at Faridabad, Haryana, by DBT as part of a Health Science and Technology Cluster.
- Innovative re-entry packages in terms of fellowships and R&D support will be offered to young and senior scientists of Indian origin to return to Indian laboratories and pursue research on national priorities.
- In order to create and strengthen world class institutional research capacity in biotechnology, 50 Centers of Excellence (CoEs) to be established during the 11th plan
- Keeping in view the requirements for translating scientific leads into useful products and processes, a new national initiative will be taken up to build capacity in technology transfer and intellectual property rights.
- Cluster development is a key strategy to promote innovation and accelerated technology and product development. This new approach has been given the green signal by the government. Four technology clusters are at an advanced stage of planning.
- Grand challenges of national relevance in the area of agriculture, health, energy and environment will be identified through national and international consultations. Programs will then be launched through multidisciplinary teams, involving public-private partnerships.
- DBT's proposal to establish new institutional structures, especially in areas very vital to India's progress but in which current strengths are suboptimal has been approved in principle by the government. The institutions, representing a new breed, will be designed with a strong bias for integrating science and translation, and for producing skilled personnel driven towards entrepreneurship.

**New Legislations**

- A draft bill entitled 'Public Funded R&D (Protection, Utilization and Regulation of Intellectual Property) Bill, 2007' has been prepared through inter-ministerial consultation for promotion of innovation, and would be introduced in the Parliament after obtaining cabinet approval.
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DNA Profiling Bill to Augment and Transform Forensic Investigation and Criminal Justice Delivery System to be introduced in the Parliament after obtaining Cabinet approval

- New Translational Initiatives for mass use technologies -- DBT will give special emphasis on translational initiatives to promote mass use technologies.
- Leveraging international partnerships to achieve global best practices in our S&T efforts for joint IP generation, harmonization of regulatory processes, smooth trans-boundary movement of biological materials, and to access global markets for our products and processes.
- Note: The details of the strategy are available on Department of Biotechnology's website <http://dbtindia.nic.in>.

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