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â??Karnataka is coming up with biotech accelerators to help startups scale upâ?

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Karnataka is taking bold steps to weave together a Global Innovation Alliance with as many countries to facilitate regular knowledge and idea exchanges, fostering innovation and investment on a global scale, paving the way for the creation of new industries, the development of emerging technologies, and the generation of high-skilled jobs. Biotechnology is a critical area of investment for the Karnataka government in the coming times as it plans to open Centres of Excellence in this sector. To find out more about the governmentâ??s focus on promoting the biotech sector, BioSpectrum spoke in detail with Priyank Kharge, Minister for IT & BT, Government of Karnataka.



Karnataka is establishing Centres of Excellence for health science and medical devices. What is the strategy in place and how soon do we expect these establishments? Which are the industry partners in this project?

Karnataka government is running the highest number of Centres of Excellence (CoEs) across sectors such as deep tech, IoT, cybersecurity, aerospace, and robotics, and now we are coming up with Centres of Excellence for health science and medical devices and also a circular economy lab, for all of which we wish to collaborate with ecosystems of countries from across the globe. By the end of this financial year, we would come up with probably India's first life sciences and medical devices Centre of Excellence, to funnel the IT and biotech sectors together with one common infrastructure. We have many industry partners coming forward for this project such as GE Healthcare, Siemens Healthineers, Merck, GSK, Johnson & Johnson, and a few more companies that are working in the space of biotechnology, medical technology etc. The whole objective of these CoEs is to nurture talent, nurture leadership within the sector, provide incubation and ensure more innovations. This project will be directly linked with the Department of Health and Medical Education. Besides commercial products, we will also focus on research-based products.

We have recently seen huge investments being made by global biotech/biopharma companies in Hyderabad with support from the government. How is Karnataka supporting the biotech/biopharma companies in a public-private partnership model, for better innovation & increased R&D investments?

Hyderabad has a strong base in the pharmaceutical space with the presence of institutes like the National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER) while Karnataka has a better ecosystem for the biotech sector. We are upscaling the biotech sector with provisions like biofoundry and biobank. In the next 6 months, we will come up with biotech accelerators to help the startups scale-up, and make their products more viable.

How do you view the role of deep tech startups for the growth of the biotech sector in India?

Karnataka government has launched a deep tech cluster seed fund to nurture startups specialising in deep tech and artificial intelligence (AI). Also, Karnataka is set to introduce a preferential public procurement policy to enhance support for startups. Under this policy, the Karnataka government would be the primary customer, streamlining the purchase of products and services that possess distinctive intellectual property. For the biotech sector, we are pushing the industry's priorities and preparing a framework to concentrate on the sector. The biotech sector is so vast and includes many newer areas such as genomics, longevity, drug discovery, pandemic preparedness etc. We need to eventually re-evaluate the priorities set by the industry, keeping in view what is best for the public at large.

How is the government improving job opportunities and upskilling within the biotech sector?

The Karnataka government has constituted a Skill Advisory Committee on Emerging Technologies which aims to contribute towards increased employability of graduates, larger and focused talent pool for companies as per their requirements. We want to produce most industry-employable candidates. We aim to engage with all the stakeholders in order to bridge the growing skill gaps between the industry requirement and Karnataka's tech talent pool.

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