

BioAsia 2005 peeps up Genome Valley

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The second edition of the three-day pan-Asia biotechnology conference held from February 10-12 in Hyderabad ended on a positive note with the signing of 27 MoUs, underlining the fact that there is tremendous potential for countries to initiate joint research and development activities and simultaneously establish effective trading links to expand operations.

According to Dr Ashok K. Sadhukhan, coordinator of B2B Forum and vice chairman, All India Biotech Association (AIBA), Southern Chapter, 72 one-to-one meetings were arranged during the event. Over 40 delegates, comprising both company representatives and individual entrepreneurs, from over 30 countries participated in the forum. Collaborations were sought in the areas of vaccines, biopharmaceuticals, diagnostic products, pharma chemistry and product development, agri-biotech, contract research, business development and outsourcing, and venture financing. AIBA was given the responsibility to arrange this forum. At the end of the event, a total of 27 accords were signed compared to 21 in 2004.

Public-private partnership important: Dr MK Bhan, secretary, Department of Biotechnology (DBT), who was the chief guest for BioAsia 2005, set the tone for the event calling for public-private partnership and funding. Dr Bhan stated: "Issues in the areas of intellectual property, science-based regulation, and strategy in the area of innovation are essential for the sector to prosper." The department is keen on simplification of the regulatory processes and within the next three months a national biotech policy would be unveiled, Dr Bhan pointed out. "The ordinance on the intellectual property rights has already been passed and the law in this regard is expected soon," he said. He was of the view that the regulatory and policy framework should inspire and motivate the industry to focus on discovery and innovation. "The objective of the policy or strategies is to make this whole area innovative. The industry on its part should capitalize on the opportunities to PABA at BioAsia 2005."

create new ideas and concepts through R&D," Dr Bhan said.

Biotech promotion strategy: Andhra Pradesh, which is one of the first states in India to have adopted a holistic approach to promote biotechnology, is strengthening its biotech base further. "The state government has evolved a three-pronged strategy to promote biotechnology. These include creation of world-class infrastructure, promotion of institutions to support bio-ecosystem and provision of investment-friendly operating environment for industries," stated the chief minister, Dr YS Rajasekhara Reddy.

Addressing a gathering of industrialists, scientists, academicians and policymakers at BioAsia-2005, Dr Reddy said the government would continue to play its role as a facilitator and a trusted partner of the industry in the path of enterprise and innovation. The chief minister said while entrepreneurs could set up their R&D facilities at the RCIPI Knowledge Park, they could establish production facilities at the Shapoorji Pallonji Biotech Park. Over 17 companies have taken space in SP Biotech Park and over 75 percent of the phase-I and 50 percent of the phase-II has already been sold out. And it will move to the third phase. "The state government has identified an additional 1,000 acres of land in the Genome Valley, on the outskirts of the city. Besides, an additional 200 acres of land for the Marine Biotech Park in Visakhapatnam is also on the anvil," said KV Rao, principal secretary, industries and commerce department, Andhra Pradesh.

On the Sidelines

Manipal Acunova to set up stem cell research center
Bengaluru-based custom research and clinical trial company, Manipal Acunova is mulling to set up an alliance development center in Los Angeles, US, with an earmarked investment of \$1 million. It will also set up a stem cell research lab in Bangalore designed by Zanders of Germany.

German firm to set up diagnostic lab in Hyderabad

Germany-based Agelab Pharma is planning to set up three diagnostic laboratories of which at least one of them would come up in Hyderabad with an estimated investment of about ₹ 2 million. Confirming this Agelab Pharma managing director Dr Anil K Mukhopadhyay said, "We are looking at franchises and tie-ups with consultancy service firms."

National animal resource facility: NK Ganguli, director general, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), informed that the project report for the National Animal Resource facility is ready and is under consideration. "The first impression of the project report shows that the proposed facility is better than the existing animal breeding facility in Mumbai," HE stated. DBT has already approved Rs 20 crore and raising capital for the project was not a constraint. "The plan for building the facility should be in place in the next 6-8 months and it would run on a corporate philosophy," he added. Ganguli said that the National Institute of Nutrition's small animal house is also getting updated and the plans and tenders were through.

FABA launched: Another important development during the event was the launch of the Federation of Asian Biotech Association (FABA). Announcing the official launch, along with the release of the logo and the memorandum of articles, Dr Anwar Nasim, chairman, National Commission of Biotechnology, Pakistan and president, FABA, said, "The organization was formed by the eight-member countries consisting of India, Iran, Pakistan, Singapore, Germany, Sri Lanka, Israel, and Philippines. Besides developing biotech activities, FABA would establish just and equitable principles of participation and practice among member countries." The organization started with eight member countries and its secretariat is located in Hyderabad. "We would now be taking this concept to as many countries as we can in the Asian region, so that there would be economic development tagging along," added Nasim.

Altana Pharma to set up R&D center in Mumbai
Focusing on medicinal chemistry, German-based Altana Pharma has decided to set up its own R&D center in India earmarking investments of around ₹ 8 million. The company has also acquired 10,000 sq m of land for the proposed center in Andheri, Mumbai. Altana Pharma MD Dr Vekar Fadale said, "The construction activities would begin in the second half of this year and we will begin recruiting scientists for the facility by June."

William A Haseltine, chairman and chief executive officer of Haseltine Associates Limited, a US based biotechnology consulting firm, was conferred the "Genome Valley Excellence Award" at BioAsia 2005.

The state is keen to step up the momentum post the biotech event. It is considering the option of having a separate department for biotech. The message seems very clear. It wants to be a leader in the space of biotechnology and establish a successful model for biotech promotion and development.

Ch. Srinivas Rao and Sunitha Natti in Hyderabad