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DST signs agreement with Peptris towards Rs 86 Cr RDI collaboration to accelerate AI-based drug discovery and development

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Four experimental drugs discovered by AI under the VIGOR programme will be advanced to clinical development



In a significant move towards accelerating the development of next-generation therapies through Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Technology Development Board (TDB) of the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India has signed an agreement with Peptris Technologies, Bengaluru, for financial support of Rs 86 crore under the Research Development and Innovation (RDI) Fund.

The project, called VIGOR: Moving AI-Discovered Molecules from the Lab to the Clinic, has a total project cost of Rs 172 crore (approximately \$1.72 billion). The aim is to advance four experimental drugs to technology readiness levels (TRLs) 4 to 6, requiring preclinical development, validation, and preparation for clinical trials. Financial support will be provided through optionally convertible debt (OCD).

The VIGOR programme includes four experimental drugs: PEPR111, which targets neuromuscular disorders and cancer; PEPRX101, which targets hair loss (alopecia); PEPR202, which targets neuropathy; and PEPR112, which targets diabetes mellitus (DMD). Each experimental drug is currently at the TRL-4 stage, and the project aims to advance it to TRL-6. The development programme envisages a structured progression over three years, including advanced preclinical and investigational new drug (IND)-enabling studies, formulation development, clinical trial preparation, and initiation activities, subject to relevant scientific and regulatory requirements.

By supporting the progress of multiple candidates under a coordinated program, the project seeks to strengthen the process of translating AI-based research into potential therapeutic products. Its focus on select disease areas also represents an opportunity to direct innovation toward conditions where effective treatment options are limited.