

India will emerge as the outsourcing hub in life sciences

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A biotech policy, 600 sq km genome valley cluster, a venture fund, infrastructure to complement and now BioAsia 2004. BP Acharya, secretary, industries and commerce department, and D Nalini Mohan, additional secretary and director (biotechnology), are driving the state's biotech initiative. Looking back with satisfaction the duo talks about the journey so far and their expectations from BioAsia 2004.

How far have we come since 2001 when the state announced its biotech policy?

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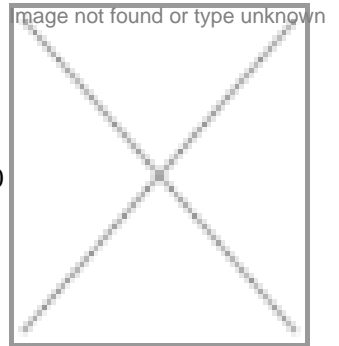
BP Acharya: Biotech Policy announced in 2001 was the foundation stone, we have taken many initiatives in taking the policy further and will continue to do so. Genome Valley is poised to become the largest biotech cluster in Asia. We expect it to be bigger than Singapore in sheer size and variety of biotech activities. And we are working towards that end. Some of our latest initiatives include—the biotech incubator in SP Park, the 200 acre agri-biotech incubator located in the Icrisat campus, Sun Centre of Excellence in Bioinformatics located in CDFD campus, 218 acre Marine Biotech Park in Visakhapatnam. We are beginning to concentrate on agri and marine biotechnology. And there is no doubt that in time India will emerge as the outsourcing hub of contract research and R&D in life sciences. Shortly, you will see our strength in vaccines manifested in the global arena. And all this is just a beginning.

What is the size of investments Genome Valley has attracted so far?

BP Acharya: We will close 2004 with at least Rs 2000 crore in investments in the biotech industry. There is a Rs 1000 crore project underway which is likely to fall through as soon as the modalities are completed. Then, Sigma Aldrich is investing Rs 120 crore and the project is in the advanced stage. There are at least three pharma and biotech majors that will announce their R&D units and investments at the event. All Indian pharma majors have their biotech arm and are in the process of setting up a project or evaluating one. Then there is a spin off effect from our participation in Bio India 2003 in Washington. Our facilities have attracted a lot of companies from North Carolina in US, Germany, Switzerland, Australia and they are in various stages of negotiation. A number of NRIs are evaluating projects proposals and have met us in the regard. Then of course we have a partnership on with Malaysia involving resource sharing and industry collaboration. And let us not forget a number of small players who are doing interesting work in biotechnology.

Given the long gestation periods for these projects, success stories, the ultimate in furthering an industry, will take time. So how do you propose to keep up the momentum?

D Nalini Mohan: We continue with our initiatives. In fact, we have already begun marketing BioAsia 2005. Events like this are usually put on the calendar much in advance given that you are tapping the world participation. We are providing a platform for the Asian countries to showcase their strengths in biotechnology to the world and collaborate wherever possible. The bio business forum will be the annual feature of the event and here our effort is to promote industry collaboration. Moreover, we continue our efforts to support the industry. Let's take just two examples: The Rs 150 crore animal house project which recently rolled out in collaboration with NIH, USA is being led by ICMR and is the largest in India spread over 100 acres. The facility on par with China will be the national resource centre for primate breeding. This itself will give a fillip to the industry in which you need animal testing in different phases of clinical trials. Or take the Life Sciences Institute which is coming up in the Hyderabad University Campus. It is designed to tackle life sciences research with a multi-disciplinary approach. The government has sanctioned Rs 10 crore for the project spread over 35 acres, of this Rs 1 crore has been released this year. What we are doing is creating the right atmosphere for the industry to flourish and success stories won't really be long in coming. We see a big boom in contract research in near future and we will be there. However, we will not stop there. We are promoting biotechnology as a whole not just an arm of biotechnology.



BP Acharya: We are going to maintain the head start. We have identified the gap in the residential accommodation in the Genome Valley and have recently allotted 30 acres of land for a world-class residential complex built exclusively for Genome Valley. The land has been taken over by APIIC which is likely to partner with Shapoorji Pallonji for the project. For now, we have christened the project Jeevanpuri.

What will be the highlight of Bio Asia 2004?

BP Acharya: It is the first one. So, may not be the perfect one but everything that happens at the event is a stepping-stone for us and the biotechnology industry in Asia. The idea is to build a bridge between Asia and the rest of the world. We have also instituted Genome Valley Excellence Award. This year it will be conferred on William J Rutter, the chairman emeritus of Chiron Corporation, US, and Prof MS Swaminathan.

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