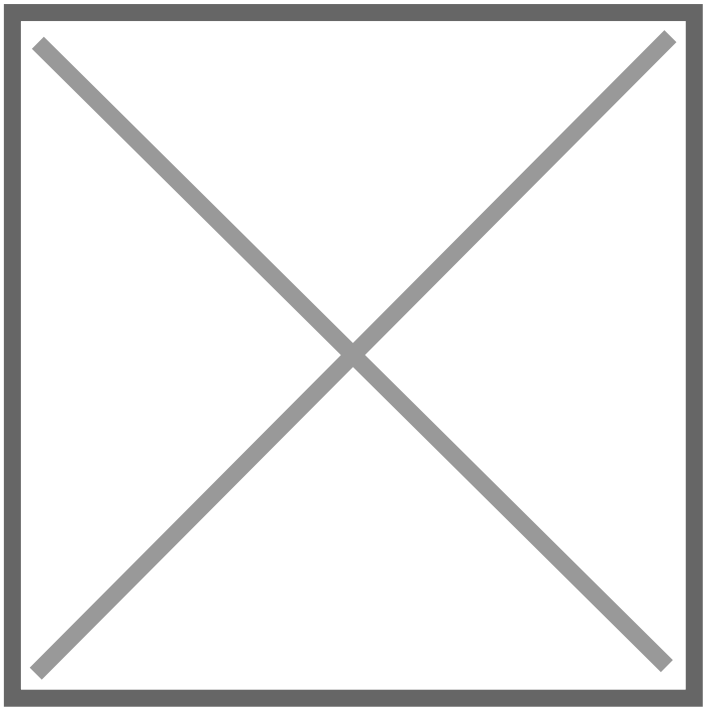
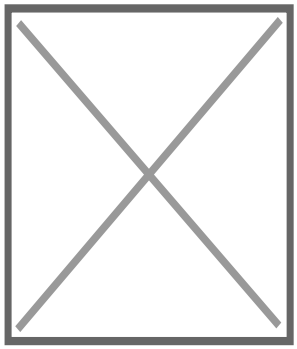
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The Kapil Sibal Effect

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The Kapil Sibal Effect



It was heartening to note that on the day he assumed office, the Minister for Science & Technology, Kapil Sibal stressed the importance of removing the regulatory bottlenecks facing the biotechnology industry. In fact, this was the most significant remark of the minister, one of the country's top legal experts on the occasion. There is another reason to cheer for the industry. As India embraces the product patent regime from next year, IPR issues could become very important and the minister has already, in a lighter vein, offered his legal services to the biotech industry.

This is important because none of the constituents of the United Progressive Alliance had devoted any particular attention to biotechnology industry in their election manifestoes. In fact, the unexpected electoral defeat of the governments led by two biotech champions, SM Krishna in Karnataka and N Chandrababu Naidu in Andhra Pradesh had cast a shadow on the interest levels of the new political dispensation to biotechnology. Sibal's announcements have removed these shadows.

With another reformer P Chidambaram assuming the mantle of the finance minister, the biotech industry could hope to get a sympathetic hearing about its demands for fiscal incentives and setting up of a Biotechnology Venture Fund at the central level to spur innovation and help first-time entrepreneurs a leg up the biotech race.

For over a year, the industry and BioSpectrum have been highlighting the need to remove the regulatory hurdles in the path of the biotech industry so that the industry could have a smooth passage to prosperity in the coming decade. On this count, some of the recent developments like the Prof MS Swaminathan Task Force Report on BioAgriculture and the on going work by Dr RA Mashelkar Task Force on Recombinant Drugs are significant developments.

Some of the highlights of the industry's presentations and the regulator's responses to their concern over recombinant drugs are presented elsewhere in this issue. Clearly, the industry point of view that the recombinant drugs approval process should not be saddled with another regulatory layer in the form of GEAC has been brought out successfully to the Mashelkar Task Force. Knowing Dr Mashelkar's ability to cut through the maze, the industry's views will find strong support in the final recommendations and pave way for the removal of this regulatory hurdle at the earliest.

There is another major development beneficial to the Indian biotech sector. A large Indian Biotechnology Mission is attending the world's largest biotech event, BIO 2004 at San Francisco. The industry team is enhanced by the presence of the top biotech policy maker, the DBT secretary, Dr M K Bhan who will take the lead in attracting the global biotech industry's attention to their fledgling Indian counterparts. A series of meetings with key officials of a dozen top biotech companies in

California have been planned. BioSpectrum too has brought an "India Biotechnology Handbook", which highlights the strengths of the country's biotech sector in its various shades for wide circulation among the 15,000 participants at the world's largest biotech industry event.

Of course, all the industry leaders agree that biotech is not a sector for the short term. It is a long-term play and it could help with every little bit of help in the long march to sustainable growth and benefits for all.

