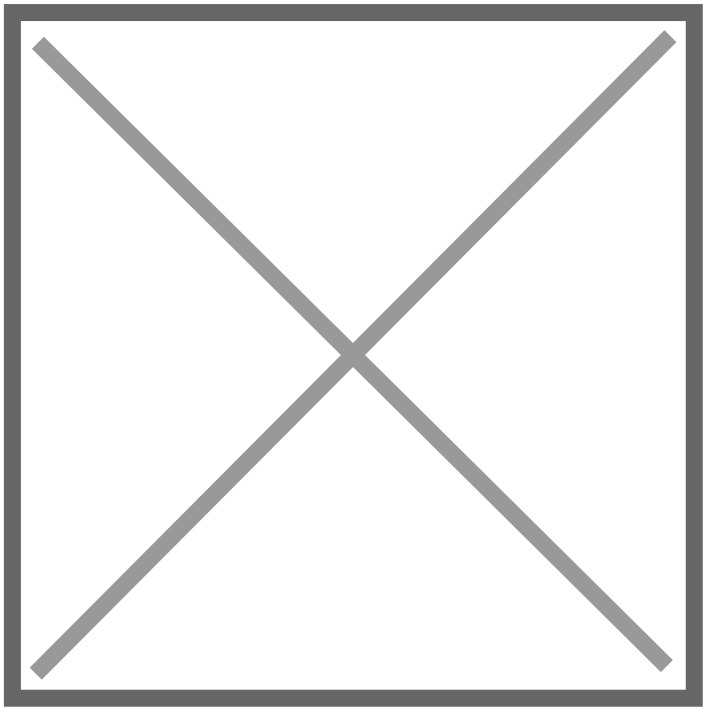
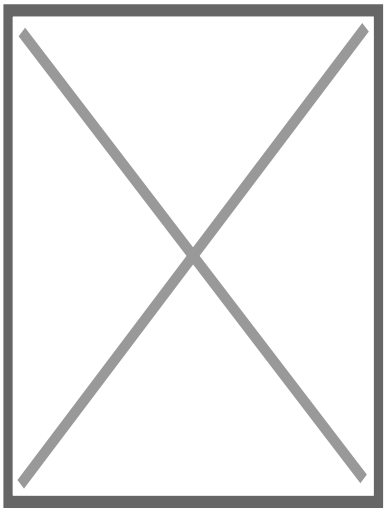
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Finance Minister turns biotech-friendly again

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Finance Minister turns biotech-friendly again



The good news has come after some time, as this special 4th anniversary issue of BioSpectrum was going to print, from Finance Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram. He has chosen biotech among the few industrial sectors to give full attention in his Budget speech this time. And he listened to the voices from the industry after giving them a cold shoulder in 2006.

So Chidambaram has given a thumbs up to many of the major demands of the industry in 2007. Biotech industry should count itself lucky this time as the finance minister has not listened to the demands of most of the other industrial sector this time. So the 150 percent weighted tax deduction for R&D expenses will continue till 2012. Of course, many were expecting him to raise the limit to 200 percent, which did not happen. The clinical trials sector gets exemption from the service tax. Biofuels will be fully exempt from excise duty, which will attract more investments into the sector and also make them more competitive vis-Ã?Â -vis conventional fuels.

Overall, the finance minister has listened to the industry's cries to be heard and seek recognition for its investments in innovation. So technology incubators will get service tax exemptions spurring the growth of specialized service providers. There is a whole list of other goodies and the industry's reactions too are captured in the current issue. Full credits for making the FM listen should go to S&T Minister Kapil Sibal and DBT Secretary M K Bhan for their tireless background efforts.

Biotech industry can take comfort by the presence of many other well-wishers in the government. The current head of GEAC (Genetic Engineering Approval Committee), BS Parsheera, the IAS officer in the Ministry of Environment and Forests, has shed the bureaucratic shyness, and boldly outlined the regulator's position in probably the first ever media interview, given to BioSpectrum, to mark the 4th anniversary issue which is chronicling the five years of Bt cotton in the country. The GEAC chief deserves fulsome praise for demystifying the process of the regulation of transgenic products in the country, as well as for his clarity in the regulatory aspects of handling a controversial technology.

There are many other firsts in this special issue, dedicated to the completion of the first five years of Bt cotton in the country. The first Bt cotton hybrid was approved for commercial cultivation on March 25, 2002. Almost all the key players in the Bt cotton saga, the companies and technologies who developed and marketed it, the regulators who approved the first transgenic product, the first farmers who switched over to the expensive but beneficial technology unmindful of the financial risks and the die-hard opponent of Bt cotton who has been calling for moderation, have been featured in this special issue. Bt cotton is indeed a remarkable success story in India despite various controversies as Indian farmers have overtaken the Chinese in planting these seeds last year. Chinese farmers are far ahead of technology adoption in almost every crop variety, except in Bt cotton.

I would like to highlight three other firsts in the 4th anniversary issue. The richest Indian and head of the country's largest industrial enterprise, Mukesh Ambani, chairman of Reliance Industries, has exclusively shared his vision on the potential of biotechnology for India in a guest column. Ambani is highly optimistic about the opportunities offered by biotechnology and is confident that Reliance Life Sciences as well other biotech entrepreneurs will make it happen for the country in this sector. Second, Gujarat's Chief Minister Narendra Modi has outlined his government's innovative initiatives to extend the state's industrial dominance in other sectors to the technology of the future and explained the reasons for his coining the term BT +BT =BT (Bharat Today+ Biotechnology = Bharat Tomorrow) in yet another BioSpectrum exclusive. Lastly, the country's most well known and richest woman entrepreneur, Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, turned a reporter for BioSpectrum to give a ringside view of the happenings at the high profile World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Switzerland, in late January.

With your continued encouragement and support, BioSpectrum will strive to achieve many more firsts in the forthcoming issues too.

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