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Dr Jitendra Kumar to take charge as new BIRAC MD

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The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved the appointment of new MD at BIRAC



Dr Jitendra Kumar, currently serving as the Director, Bangalore Bioinnovation Centre (BBC), will be stepping in as the new Managing Director (MD) of Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), an institution set up by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Government of India, to nurture and promote biotechnology innovations and industry in India. He will be joining the office in the first or second week of June 2023.

In an exclusive chat with BioSpectrum, Dr Kumar spoke in detail about his vision and strategies for the new role. “A major challenge being faced by startups in India is the inability to scale up. So, my vision would be to facilitate scaling up of startups. There is also a need to establish a platform where big companies can interact with startups. BIRAC can provide such a platform to the startups”, he said.

“BIRAC can also partner with some of the progressive states, and run state level programmes for the startups. Such an exercise has not been done before”, he added.

Dr Kumar also has plans to lay emphasis on developing new policy norms for the regulatory hurdles being encountered by startups across the country, particularly those working on new emerging technologies.

When asked whether BIRAC is exploring a new strategy to ensure an increase in the number of biotech startups from 5000 to 50,000 in the years to come, Dr Kumar said, “A more robust way to gradually increase the number of biotech startups in our country would be to adopt institutional mechanisms where we can have dedicated programmes within the academic institutes to commercialise those technologies that are lying on the shelf, with support, funding and incubation from BIRAC. The institutional mechanisms could also create ventures and it can turn out be an evolutionary process for the growth of biotech startups”.

Dr Kumar holds a PhD degree in Biotechnology from Institute of Microbial Technology, Chandigarh. Subsequently, he moved to University of Illinois at Chicago, where he worked on leukaemia. He also holds an MBA degree from the Fisher College of Business at Ohio State University, US.

After returning from US, he joined as a Vice- President of Life Science Incubator at IKP Knowledge Park, Hyderabad where he was involved in actively mentoring incubatee companies, creating pipeline of entrepreneurs through innovative models of team building around the technologies, working with public R&D laboratories and universities to create entrepreneurial models of commercialisation.

Later, he took charge as the Director & Head of BBC with a focus on incubating innovations in agriculture, food and nutrition, biofuel/bio-energy and pharma/healthcare.

He has worked closely with Department of Biotechnology, Government of India and the Department of Electronics, IT, BT and S&T, Government of Karnataka, to create a vibrant Life Sciences Innovation cluster in Bangalore. He is also a guest faculty at University of Agricultural Sciences, Centre for Human Genetics, Manipal Institute of Regenerative Medicine (MIRM). In addition, he has also delivered guest lectures at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bangalore.

He is a member of various Central and State Government Committees and advises on policy matters related to startups, innovation and entrepreneurship in Life Sciences. Currently, he is a member of CII national committee on Biotechnology, Member of Association of Biotech Led Enterprises (ABLE), Member of committee for Karnataka Start-up policy and Member for Government of India supported Bangalore Innovation cluster under the aegis of IISc, Bangalore.

Dr Kumar is an internationally acclaimed thinker and advisor on Biotech Innovations and entrepreneurship. He has been invited as a speaker at various conferences in USA, South Korea and the Netherlands to represent India and Karnataka. He has inspired thousands of youths to start and build successful Biotech ventures. He has around 20 years of experience in research and innovation management in the area of life sciences. He has around 25 peer reviewed publications and around 45 products have been launched under his mentorship.