Future looks bright for Indian biotech

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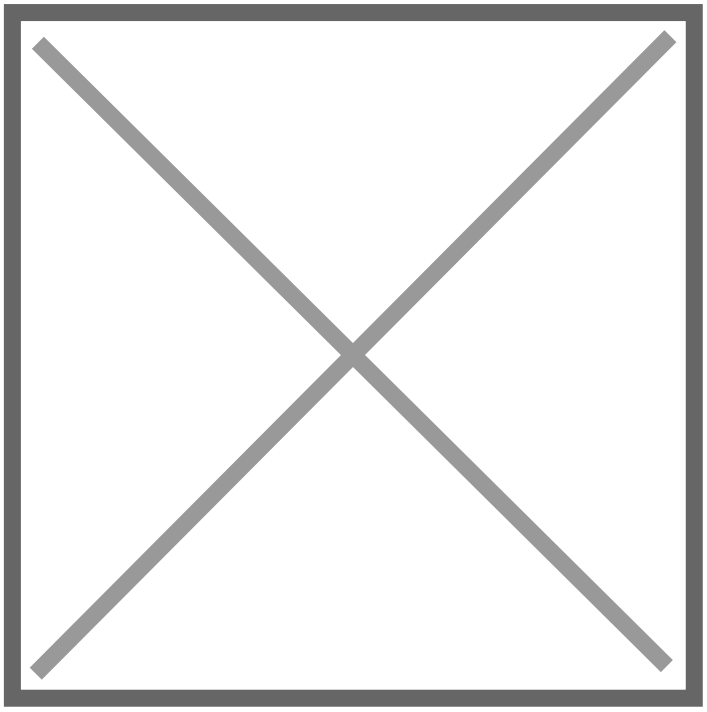

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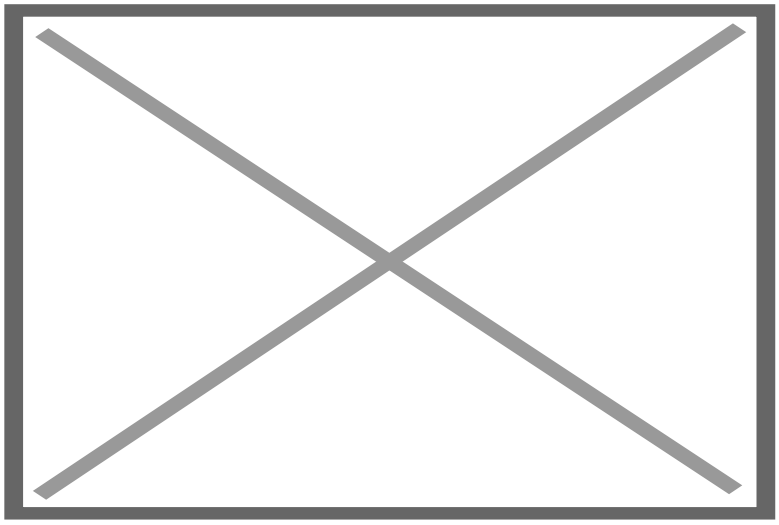


'Biotech for a better tomorrow' was the focal theme of the 10th edition of Bangalore India BIO 2010, the rechristened form of India's biggest biotech show Bangalore BIO. The three-day event (June 2-4, 2010) held in Bangalore comprised multi-track conferences, international trade show, biopartnering, CEO conclave, bio excellence award and a host of other events. The multi-track conferences consisted of 25 sessions with over 100 speakers participating in it.

Participation from 20 countries, 700 delegates and 800 B2B meetings made the event a notable one.

The event organized by the Department of Information Technology, Biotechnology and Science and Technology, Government of Karnataka, Vision Group on Biotechnology and MM Activ Sci-Tech Communications was inaugurated by BS Yeddyurappa, Chief Minister of Karnataka.

The other dignitaries present during the inauguration included Rob Norris, Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Labor, Government of Saskatchewan, Canada; SV Ranganath, Chief Secretary, Government of Karnataka; Richard Hyde, British Deputy High Commissioner to Karnataka; Prof. Samir K Brahmachari, DG, CSIR and Secretary, DSIR, Government of India; Ashok Manoli, Principal Secretary for IT & BT and Science and Technology, Government of Karnataka; Dr Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Chairperson, Karnataka's Vision Group on Biotechnology and CMD of Biocon and Aravind Jannu, Director, Directorate of IT and BT, Government of Karnataka and Managing Director, of KBITS.

Dr Kiran Mazumdar Shaw gave an account of the 10 years of transformative period, in which Bangalore BIO has evolved to become Bangalore India BIO. She said, "Bangalore has become a global hub for clinical data management and post marketing data management. Now, we have most diversified bioclusters in Karnataka. Of the 380 biotechnology companies of India, 198 are in Karnataka and 191 of them are in Bangalore. Having come a long way, now is the time to shift from western centric models. India and China can play a lead role in the world in the areas of food security and healthcare."

Rob Norris said, "Canada has 33 agreements with India which include agriculture and health sectors. Canada is looking forward to work jointly with India in genomics, water purification and security, and food security."

“India has shown its competitiveness in the past two decades and now it is time to work towards R&D leadership. We can achieve this by removing hierarchical bureaucratic and academic structures. From next year onwards, India will produce about a million engineers and if we deploy them in the R&D projects even for few months, we can do wonders,” said Prof. Samir K Brahmachari.

The 10th edition of Bangalore India BIO 2010 concluded on June 4, 2010 on a high note. The 11th Edition of the event will be held from May 4-6, 2011 in Bangalore.

Industry needs stronger financial support: CEOs

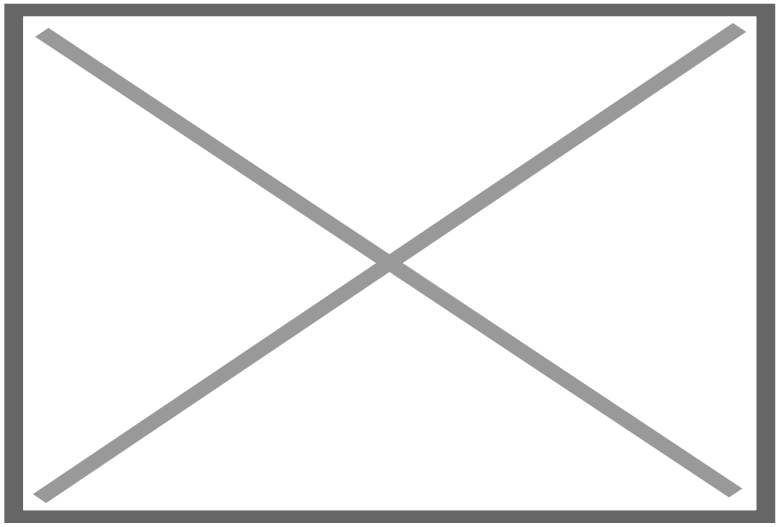
The panel was moderated by N Suresh, Group Editor of Bio Spectum and Technology Review India. The general consensuses was that companies primarily need financial support, a good state-of-the-art research platform and excellent networking skills. Session moderator summarized the session saying “The government and the industry should work very closely to ensure that the industry grows”.

Partnerships - key to drug discovery and R&D

Optimistically opening a session on 'International partnerships - key to drug discovery and R&D', Dr Scott J Grossman, Vice President, Scientific Director, BBRC, Bristol-Myers Squibb Company, said, “A recent research has found that the API delivery time in 2010 just took one month. All this become possible due to the combined efforts achieved through partnerships. The factors that are required to be successful in partnership are bright, motivated, inquisitive, scientist working together on high end knowledge and discovery.”

Mani Iyer, Group Director, Intas Biopharmaceuticals and Dr CSN Murthy, CEO of Aurigene Discovery Technologies were also part of the discussion panel.
The speakers stressed that partnership is needed in all stages of drug discovery. Several partnership models are being used successfully in India. In the global biotech industry, Indian pharma companies are on the way to be recognized. The strategy should be flexible and there are no short cuts in this process of drug discovery. The discussion concluded on the note that partnerships are the best way to foster innovation and help discovery of new drugs.

Biosimilars – big opportunity but bigger hurdles



The session on “Successfully negotiating the biosimilars landscape” was scheduled on day two of the event. The session was chaired by Dr PM Murali, Managing Director, Evolva Biotech.

Dr KV Subramaniam, President and CEO of Reliance Life Sciences, said, "The global biosimilars opportunity is significant, valued at about Rs 323,253 crore ($70 bn) covering 25 products. An integrated biosimilars initiative requires several competencies working seamlessly across the value chain. Competitive advantages in biosimilars will hinge on quality, cost, time-lines and regulated market access. The technology hurdles, significant cost and regularity pathway in development markets are major challenges faced. The right talent and partnership play a key role in addressing challenges in biosimilars.”

Dr Eric Grund, Senior Director, Biopharma Applications, GE life sciences, said, “As the regulatory pathway for biosimilars in Europe and the US becomes clearer, manufacturing of these products still remain challenging. There is a pressure in increasing the efficiency and there are market uncertainties.”

There is a geographic shift from west to east

A session on 'Meeting the challenges and actualizing the potential in clinical trials' was chaired by DA Prasanna, Managing Director and Founder of Ecron Acunova. He said “India is engaged in clinical research for the last 15 years, reason being the size of the population, English communication, diseases burden, naive patient’s advantages, and western medical education.

Dr Ferzaan Engineer, CEO of Quintiles India, said, “The landscape is changing and the new models of business are emerging. There is geographic shift from west to east and there is a need to adapt and evolve. Change is the need of the hour. There is a need for potential reverse innovation in the pharmaceutical industry.”

Regulatory issues for biopharma industry

The event also had a session on “Regulatory issues for biopharma industry”. The speakers urged the Biotechnology Regulatory Authority of India to keep up with the rapid technological developments in the industry.

Dr KK Tripathi, Adviser and Member secretary, RCGM of the Department of Biotechnology, Government of India, who presided the session, said, “As the regulators are not very clear on the latest issues of the industry, industry should take active initiative to bring their concerns to the regulatory authorities.”

Dr Tripathi added, “Present regulations do not permit phase-I trials of any pharma product that is not developed in India. As the scenario is changing and in order to save the lives of many people we need to address such issues. Regulators are stressing for a change in this matter and the industry can expect good news soon.”

Dr Smita Singhania, Head, Regulatory Affairs and Project Management, Cadila Healthcare; Dr Vibha Ahuja, General Manager, Biotech Consortium India; Teresa Stanek Rea, Partner, Crowell & Moring LLP, US; Martin B Cox, Business Development Manager, Faculty of Medical sciences, New Castle University, UK; and Brijesh Patel, Deputy Manager, Licensing, Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, UK, were also part of the discussion.

Issues in vaccine development

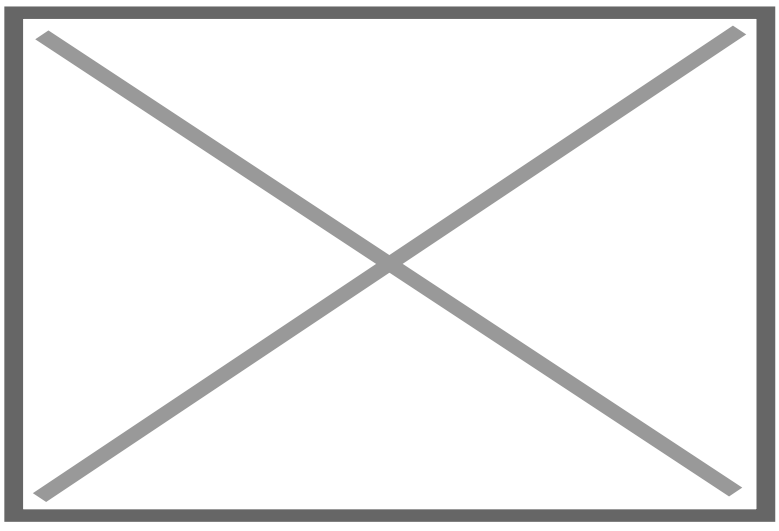
A session on vaccines for emerging medical conditions, neglected diseases and pandemic preparedness was organized on day two.

Dr SD Ravetkar, Senior Doctor, Serum Institute of India, began by saying, having been in this industry for the past 40 years, he has observed that vaccine industry was not growing much but he predicted that vaccine is definitely the future of India.

Anjali Nayyar, Country Program Leader, PATH, said, “Pandemic has a social and economic cost and there is a need to have better preparedness for it. Over 300 infectious diseases have been identified so far, however, no vaccines are available for some of the diseases of public importance. Some vaccines exist but they are not optimally used.”

Dr Vinayak, President, Biopharmaceutical Research Center, Panacea Biotec, said, “The challenges in this industry are business environment, scientific environment, traditional vaccine industry and competitive environment. In 2008, the vaccine market was estimated at Rs 96,977 crore ($21 bn). Companies invested about 15-20 percent in R&D in 2008. The cost to develop and license a new product is Rs 3,924-4,155 crore ($850-900 mn) in developed countries.

Agribiotech day



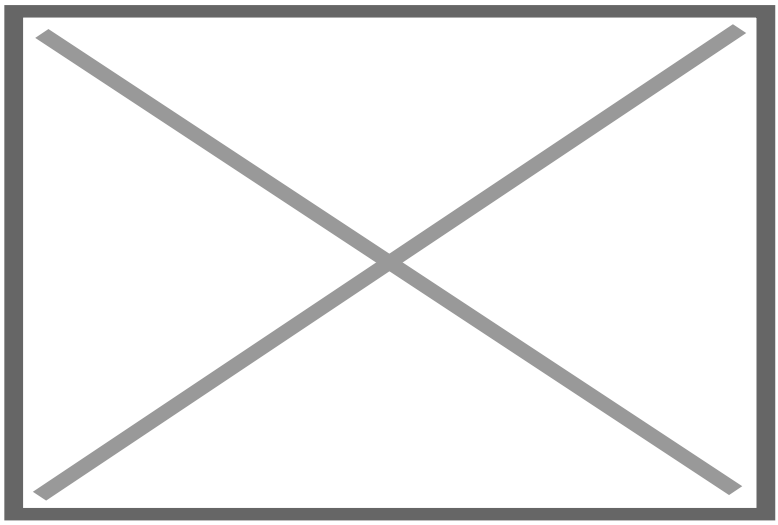
On the third day, a session was held on “New age technologies for food and nutrition security'.

Dr KK Narayanan, MD, Metahelix Life Sciences, began the session by saying,“Most of the new age technologies are still in the lab and not on the field.” Further he added that the discussion would address serious problems faced in agriculture, whether we have the right ecosystem in India to support technologies, and if not, what changes can be made to make farmers access new age technologies. Discussions would also be on regulatory systems in India, its increasing uncertainty, issues regarding what Indian farmers believe and what they need.

Prof. G Padmanabhan, NASI Platinum Jubilee Chair, Department of Biochemistry, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, said, “Traditional techniques of agriculture like crop rotation can tackle lots of issues, but India should not seclude itself from the experience and knowledge of the rest of the world. One of the arguments in the Bt brinjal case is that it has been developed by Mahyco in which Monsanto has 26 percent stake. China on the other hand has followed a dual policy; it has approved GM from MNCs and is also developing its own Bt rice.”

He closed the discussion with the following recommendations – “Limited release of Bt brinjal seeds, decision on GM crops to be taken in Parliament based on scientific data, decisions to be taken on case-to-case basis.”

GIM attracts global investments



Karnataka wooed global investors with its ambitious Global Investors Meet (GIM) held on June 3-4, 2010, in Bangalore. The event aimed at showcasing the vast potential of investment in the state. Over thousand investors from all across the world took part in the two-day meet in Bangalore.

GIM helped Karnataka government to ink healthcare projects worth Rs 4,500 crore. Chief Minister of Karnataka, BS Yeddyurappa announced that the State Government has signed 361 MoUs with investors for a total investment of Rs 400,000 crore.

The Government plans to establish a system to monitor and review the progress of the projects for which MoUs have been signed.