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Industry-academia pioneers meet, discuss innovation

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Dr Renu Swarup, managing director, BIRAC addressing the delegates at the BIRAC Innovators meet:

The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) innovators meet was not an ordinary one in the history of Indian biotechnology. Held at Manesar (Haryana) on October 15-16, 2012 the first-of-its-kind, â€œInnovation for Affordable Product Developmentâ€? meeting saw the bigwigs of biotech industry and academia interacting with each other for the first time on a

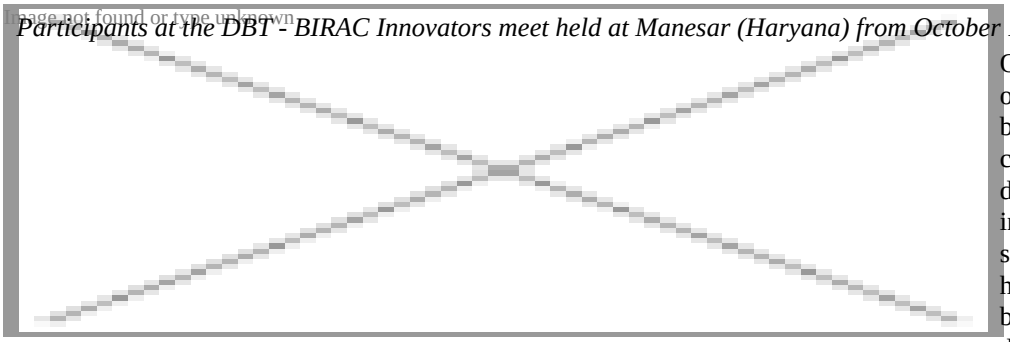
government sponsored platform. The distinguishing factor about the event was the keen focus given on innovators to interact, network and discuss successful case studies, challenges and opportunities for strengthening the biotech enterprise.

In his opening remarks, Dr G Padmanabhan, NASI-chairman and former director, Indian Institute of Science, talked about the relevance of sharing information. He called upon the influential people in the biotech sector to come out of their shells and be more proactive. â€œIn earlier times, industry used to be after the academia, but now we see that it is happening vice versa. SBIRI and BIPP have been instrumental in bringing about that change,â€? said Dr Padmanabhan. Speaking further on the current status of projects in diverse verticals of the biotech sector, he opined, â€œIn biopharma, there are various products that are still in pipeline and the development is still not complete. I hope to see more and more of them seeing the light of the day soon. Further, I feel that the focus should be more on vaccines. In agribiotechnolgy, we have only Bt Cotton as a successful product and others that could have made impact were lost in between efforts.â€?

Sounding highly enthusiastic, Dr MK Bhan, secretary, DBT in his address to the gathering said, â€œLet's keep working towards the future and see ourselves as architects of the same step by step. In next 30 years, we must be known as global leaders. For that we need to work towards building a strong system of innovation. Empowerment of young innovators in various areas is one of the strategic keys to achieve that task. Also we must understand the supply and demand or push and pull process thoroughly.â€?

Dr Bhan also demanded the public institutes to be more forthcoming. â€œThe public sector science must produce knowledge that can empower industry. However, the question is whether we as academia are doing enough for pushing the innovation?â€?

Dr Renu Swarup, managing director, BIRAC while welcoming the delegates said, â€œI hope this forum helps you all in identifying the opportunities to collaborate and work together for laying down a road map to future.â€? The recently setup public sector organization of DBT, ministry of science and technology, and the BIRAC aims at empowering and enabling the biotech innovation ecosystem for affordable product development. One of the key strategies of BIRAC is fostering innovating capabilities in all places of research and with a focus on start-ups and SMEs.



Participants at the DBT - BIRAC Innovators meet held at Manesar (Haryana) from October 15-16, 2012

On the occasion, five biotech companies doing research in different sectors such as healthcare, biomedical devices and diagnostics, agriculture, industrial products and green technology were honored with DBT-BIRAC innovation awards. Of those, four companies are recipients of SBIRI support and have completed their projects with remarkable success. In the area of agriculture, Bioseed Research India, Hyderabad, and International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, New Delhi, were awarded for their contribution in rice hybrids with improved characteristics. In the area of healthcare, Strand Life Sciences, Bangalore, was honored for its contribution in hepatotoxicity prediction platform (Heptox).

The awards in biomedical devices, implants and diagnostics sector went to Perfint Healthcare, Chennai, for its contribution in CT guided robotic positioning system (ROBIO EX) and automated device for planning, execution and confirmation of targeted tumor ablation therapy (MAXIO). The award in the industrial processes and green technology sector was given to Pelican Biotech and Chemical Labs, Alppuzha, Kerala, for their contribution in novel methods for isolation of biochemicals and value-added products from crustacean exoskeleton. Navya Biologicals, Hubli, Karnataka received the award for its contribution in developing platform technologies for production of complex proteins, peptides and mAbs.

The exhibitions and round table sessions in the areas of agriculture, diagnostics, drugs and vaccines and green technology were the highlights of the meet. The first plenary session was on transformation from science to

business for biotech companies. The session captured the experiences of entreprenuers and start-ups. The moderators included Mr Utkarsh Palnitkar, MD, Pluripotent Capital; and Dr Anand Anandkumar, chairman, and MD, Cellworks Research India. The panelists for this session were Prof. K Ramachandran, Indian School of Business; Dr Sanjay Singh, CEO, Gennova Biopharmaceuticals; Ms Deepanwita Chattopadhyay, MD and CEO, IKP Knowledge Park; Mr Vinay Konaje, founder and director, Navya Biologicals; Mr Pankaj Sharma, CEO, LeadInvent Technologies; and Mr Sidhant Jena, CEO, Janacare Solutions.

The second plenary session was focussed on the dicovery led innovation research, the resulting success stories, potential opportunities and barriers. The moderators for the session were Prof. NK Ganguly, Translational Health Science and Technology Institute (THSTI) and Dr Rajesh Jain, joint MD, Panacea Biotec. The panelists for the second session included Dr Vijay Chauthaiwale, VP, Torrent Pharmaceuticals; Dr Anand Khedkar, principal scientific manager, Biocon Research; Dr Srikant Viswanadha, director (Bio), Incozen Therapeutics, Dr KK Narayanan, MD, Metahelix Life Sciences; and Dr B Mazumder, principal scientist, Mitra Biotech.

On the second day, four parallel sessions were organized in the area of vaccines, diagnostics, biomedical implants and devices, agriculture, and industrial process. In the Panel I for drugs and vaccines, the moderators were Dr VS Chauhan, director, ICGEB, Dr Rajat Goyal, country director, International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI).

Among the panelists were Dr TS Rao, advisor, DBT; Mr Rayasam Prasad, COO, Biological E; Dr Umesh Shaligram, director, R&D, Serum Institute of India, Dr Goutam Ghosh, VP, Technology Management Group; Panacea Biotec; Dr Ashwini Nangia, director, technology, Crystalin Research; Dr K Mosuvan, MD, Tergene Biotech; and Dr Radha Rangarajan, CEO, Vitas Pharma Research.

Panel II was on biomedical devices and diagnostics. Moderators: Dr Navin Khanna, group leader, ICGEB and Dr BV Ravi Kumar, MD, XCyton Diagnostics. Panelists: Dr Balram Bhargava, ED, Stanford India Biodesign (SIB) Centre, AIIMS, Dr Alok Ray, professor, IIT Delhi; Dr Alka Sharma, scientist 'F', DBT; Mr Yashdeep Kumar, MD, Stryker India, Dr V Gnasekaran, GM, Perfint Healthcare; Mr Dinesh Kumar, director, DesignInnova; Dr Rohit Srivastava, associate Prof., IIT Mumbai; and Mr Avijit Bansal, SIB fellow, SIB Centre.

For Panel III which was on agriculture, the moderators were Dr Deepak Pental, director, CGMCP, University of Delhi; Dr Vijay Raghavan, Sathguru; and Dr KK Narayanan, MD, Metahelix Life Sciences. Among the panelists were Dr Akhilesh Tyagi, director, NIPGR; Dr P Balasubramanian, professor, TNAU; Dr Ajay Parida, ED, MSSRF, Dr JP Khurana, professor, University of Delhi; Dr KS Narayanaswamy, chairman and CEO, Geo Biotechnologies India; Dr Paresh Verma, Bioseed; Dr Arvind Kapur, CEO (Veg. Div.), Rasi Seeds, and Dr JS Rajput, director, Nirmal Seeds.

Panel IV titled 'industrial products and green technology' was moderated by Dr S Ramaswamy, CEO, C-CAMP. The panelists included Dr AK Panda, scientist â€œEâ€?, National Institute of Immunology; Dr Arvind Lali, professor and head, DBT-ICT Centre for Energy Biosciences; Mr Ashish Mantri, MD, Abhay Cotex; Dr Banibrata Pandey, VP, Nagarjuna Fertilizers and Chemicals; Mr Nelson Vadassery, manager, Tech and Engg, Sea6 Energy; Dr Sunil Khanna, professor, NIIT University; and Mr Sunil Chari, director, Rossari Biotech.

This convergence of innovators proved to be useful for discussing and presenting some of the important issues including successful case studies; wherein technologies have been translated to product development, promoting and further augmenting industry-academia interaction, promoting high risk and high level innovation, opportunities and issues in mobilizing resources, and critical factors which need to be addressed, especially in the case of spin-offs, start-ups and SME's involved in product innovation.