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ABLE proposes India-Montana “bio-bridge” to drive biotech partnerships

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Dr P M Murali, President, Council of Presidents, ABLE, said India and Montana could build natural alliances across life sciences



The Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises (ABLE) has proposed an action-oriented India-Montana biotechnology corridor, aimed at translating growing interest between the two ecosystems into concrete business, research and investment partnerships.

Speaking at a CXO-level roundtable with Montana Governor Greg Gianforte and his delegation in Bengaluru, Dr P M Murali, President, Council of Presidents, ABLE, said India and Montana could build natural alliances across agriculture, life sciences, advanced manufacturing, bio-ingredients, precision fermentation, biosensors and biomanufacturing.

Murali said the objective should go beyond a one-time delegation or memorandum of understanding and create a sustained mechanism through which companies and institutions from both sides could work together. "We are looking at a corridor where both countries and the states of both places, and the people and the companies, work together," Murali said.

A key focus of his proposal was to position Montana as a landing point for Indian biotechnology companies entering the US, while creating reciprocal opportunities for Montana companies seeking partnerships and markets in India. He said ABLE could provide local support and help companies navigate the respective ecosystems.

Focus on bio-ingredients and precision fermentation

Murali identified bio-ingredients and precision fermentation as important areas for India-Montana collaboration. Given Montana's strong agricultural base, he said there was potential to connect agricultural production with high-value biotechnology and biomanufacturing. He also pointed to opportunities in biosensors, noting that Bengaluru already has companies working in the field, while Montana could provide complementary capabilities and market access.

Another significant opportunity, according to Murali, is contract development and manufacturing organisation (CDMO) and contract manufacturing organisation (CMO) partnerships. With US companies increasingly looking for manufacturing support, he said Indian companies could play an important role in providing cost-competitive manufacturing capabilities. He also highlighted the challenge of achieving competitive costs in biological manufacturing and the need for greater collaboration around green chemistry and sustainable manufacturing.

Agriculture and protein value addition

Murali also drew attention to the intersection of biotechnology and agriculture. He said agricultural commodities could be converted into high-value proteins and other value-added products, creating opportunities for Montana's agricultural ecosystem and India's biotechnology and food-processing capabilities to work together. "This is one area that I am very interested in," Murali said, referring to the potential for value addition, particularly in proteins.

Creating an investment bridge

Funding was another area highlighted by Murali. He noted that access to capital remains a persistent challenge for biotechnology companies and proposed developing a mechanism to connect Indian investors with US companies and vice versa. "Capital is going to be the key on whatever business that we are going to be doing here," he said.

Such a reciprocal investment network, he suggested, could complement commercial, manufacturing and research partnerships between the two regions.

10-plus-10 companies in 90 days

To ensure that the engagement produces tangible outcomes, Murali proposed a 90-day action plan. The initial objective is to bring together 10 Indian companies and 10 Montana companies and encourage them to explore actual business or technology collaborations rather than allowing the engagement to remain at the level of an MoU. "Can 10 Indian companies, 10 companies from Montana, get together and start dealing with something so that it's just not consigned to an MoU, but can it flourish into some sort of a collaboration?" he asked.

He also proposed establishing a small implementation working group involving ABLE and Montana representatives to drive follow-up activities, identify opportunities and address issues emerging from company-to-company engagements. Murali further suggested that the India-Montana engagement should be sustained through annual meetings, allowing companies and institutions to review progress, identify new opportunities and resolve challenges.

Building a sustained India-Montana 'bio-bridge'

Concluding his remarks, Murali proposed maintaining the engagement through what he described as a "bio-bridge" between the two ecosystems.

The CXO-level roundtable, facilitated by ABLE, brought together Montana's delegation and representatives of Indian biotechnology, biopharma, medtech, genomics, bio-manufacturing and research organisations. Participants included companies working in CAR-T therapies, microbiome research, medical devices, genomics, cell and regenerative medicine, plant proteins, bio-manufacturing, oncology, precision fermentation and brain mapping.

The discussions provided a platform for Indian companies to explore opportunities with Montana's industry, universities, research institutions and government agencies, with the broader objective of developing partnerships spanning R&D, clinical research, manufacturing, investment and access to the North American market.

Murali's proposal positions the Bengaluru-Montana engagement as a long-term industry-led collaboration, with ABLE seeking to move the relationship from dialogue to measurable company-level partnerships within the next 90 days.

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