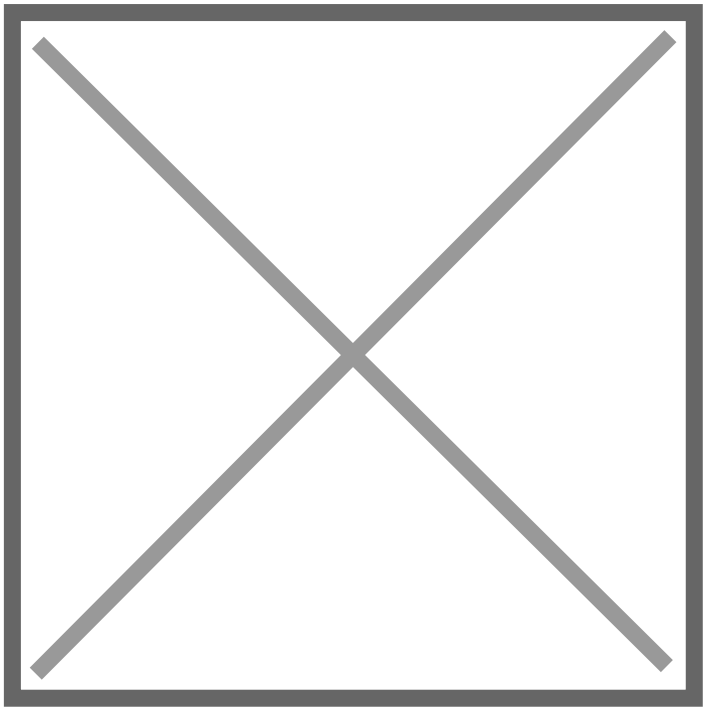
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NSA submits GM crop safety report to government

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Once again the hopes have been raised on the possible rethinking by the government on lifting the moratorium issued on Bt Brinjal since Feb 9, 2010.

This is after the six National Science Academies (NSA) in India submitted the report titled “The Role of GM Crops” to the Union Minister of Environment and Forests (MoEF), Government of India.
In order to have the opinion of the distinguished scientists and experts on the genetically modified crops, the MoEF had earlier asked the NSAs to examine all aspects of safety and utility of GM crops to Indian environment and agriculture.

The Agricultural Group (AG) of the Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises (ABLE) has also welcomed the report resubmitted by the six NSAs. The ABLE – AG added that this report is based on complete scientific assessment of the safety and utility of GM crops to Indian agriculture.

Dr Shanthu Shantharam, executive director of ABLE-AG, said, “The contents of academies report were based on scientific facts and this latest report is in line with many other scientific reports and opinions published by other leading scientific establishments of the world.

When scientific reasoning prevails, and when politics and ideology are kept out of science and technology issues, everyone wins.”

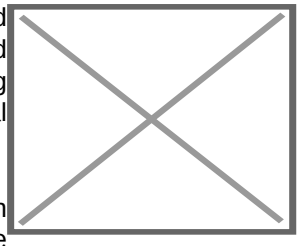
Govt to monitor pharma takeovers

Following recent takeovers of Indian pharmaceutical companies by multinational companies (MNCs), there seems to be a possibility in a rising number of similar takeovers. Considering the fact that these events could have a direct impact on the Indian healthcare scenario as well as on pricing and availability of medicines in India, the government has felt an immediate need for an appropriate assessment, in order to find out whether it will actually affect the patients in India.

While revealing plans by the government in this regard, the Minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilizers, Mr Srikant Kumar Jena said, “The Department of Pharmaceuticals has requested the Department of Commerce to conduct a study on the recent takeovers of Indian companies by MNCs. Thereafter, the recommendation could be placed before the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister and/or competent authority.”

Pharma gets a funding boost

The Science and Engineering Research Council (SERC) under the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India, has emerged as a national model for a transparent and rigorous peer review mechanism. International science and technology cooperation for joint funding through bottom-up models is based on SERC peer view mechanism which demonstrates cultural similarities with many developed countries in Europe.



SERC is planning to make efforts to come up with more product patents and leverage the Indian pharma industry to take newer molecules for clinical trial phases. The council also plans to study the diseases prevalent among the captive as well as in restricted geographical area of endangered animals and birds.

According to the Ministry of Science and Technology, under the SERC mechanism, a total of 530 new projects costing about $35.58 mn (160.3 crore) were sanctioned under broad areas of science and engineering in 2009-10. In addition, funds were sanctioned for about 1,250 ongoing projects. A total of 24 R&D projects including collaborative and loan projects have been initiated during the same year.

The DST is also putting efforts to financially support industries as well as publicly funded institutions by providing projects for development of drugs for diseases pertinent to our country and certain lifestyle diseases like leprosy, malaria, tuberculosis, Japanese encephalitis, syphilis, leishmaniasis, filariasis, HIV/AIDS, tetanus, measles, drug resistant enteric Fever, hepatitis B, skin disorders such as leucoderma and psoriasis, gastrointestinal disorders such as diarrhoea and cholera besides infections leading to trypansomiasis and ascariasis.

The Ministry of Science and Technology with a mandate to strengthen R&D in India during the 11th Five Year Plan period has embarked upon multi-pronged approach to further strengthen its service to the science and technology sector.