

Industry expects Modi-fied decisions

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Often the ministers have been looked at as either promoters of a business friendly environment or the ones who create policy paralysis. For that matter, the Narendra Modi led government from the day one of its office, has exhibited tremendous seriousness and a message that it means business. The bioscience industry that has been dealing with major policy issues from a long time is no doubt excited to see a stable government with perceived business friendly attitude. The mood was visible with this immediate tweet from Dr Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, CMD, Biocon, "We are with you in your mission of unleashing the energy of India. You have the vision and the conviction to make great things happen." In her response, Ms Anu Acharya, founder and CEO of Ocimum Bio Solutions and Map My Genome told BioSpectrum, "Hope that they (Modi government) streamline the process and demand that timelines be met." Most of the industry associations have been excited about the new government and keenly watching as its working style unfolds.

Starting with the union health ministry, Dr Harsh Vardhan, its new head, is an expert in the area as he comes from a medical background. He is credited with initiating the Pulse Polio program for the first time in Delhi when he was the health minister. Well that sounds like good news for the vaccine industry as the minister can push the projects that need immediate attention. A major pioneering initiative of Dr Vardhan was his act of implementing WHO's Essential Drug Program, which revolutionized governments' attitude on public health care. Under the concept, maximum budgetary outlay was apportioned to those drugs that are most needed by people. It was henceforth known as the "Delhi Model" and taken up by several foreign countries and at least a dozen state governments in India. The Delhi Society for Promotion of Rational use of Drugs headed by Dr Vardhan had also launched the Healthy City Project, the Hepatitis B Immunization Program and a Delhi Research Centre for Modernized Promotion of Ayurveda. The BJP, in its manifesto has exclusively pointed to Ayurgenomics.

Mr Ananth Kumar who is the chemicals and fertilisers minister will be equally responsible for helping frame drug policies. The department of pharmaceuticals is a part of this ministry. Looking at his working style, the pharma industry may expect a quick transition from the period of non-decisiveness.

Science too has a doctor

The renowned diabetologist from Jammu and Kashmir, Dr Jitendra Singh is the minister of state in the cabinet with an

independent charge of science and technology. Known as a proactive person who joined politics for changing the health scenario, he is expected to understand the policymaking for science and technology as well. An author of eight books and a columnist, he will have to take some quick decisions on a few pending appointments, especially for the post of director general of Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and secretary of department of science and technology (DST). He will also have to ensure that the Biotechnology Regulatory Authority of India (BRAI) bill is passed in the parliament. BJP, in its manifesto had praised the fact that Indian advancements in biological sciences are being documented and recognized all over the world. However, it had asked for enough biosafety data and labelling of GM food. The rewarding of innovation and focus on biofuels too was on the agenda of the party.

Regulations require a rejig

Highlighting his expectations that reflect those of the most in the industry, Mr Balvinder Kang, a well-known farmer said, "The new government should provide farmers access to the latest technology as it is not expensive. We would also like FDI in agri sector because farmers will benefit from it."

Therefore, Mr Radha Mohan Singh who has joined the cabinet as the new agriculture minister has a lot of responsibilities to fulfil. Having been elected MP for five times, he has been a member of many standing committees. He has been involved in the Kisan morcha activities of his party and hails from a rural background in Bihar. Therefore, the agriculture ministry seems the best bet for him. However, the agri-biotech industry might have to do a lot of convincing on a couple of issues related to policy and regulations. It would be interesting to know what line of thinking the new minister takes on genetically modified crops. He will have to strike a balance between activists on the one hand, and corporate and product development on the other.

Mr Prakash Javdekar, besides being the information and broadcasting minister, has been given the environment ministry. From the day of his joining office, he has talked about balancing environmental and business needs. He cited the importance of industry and regulations being on a equal footing. Given this kind of perception, he is expected to clear the files much faster than his predecessors in the UPA government.

Another related industry that involves bioscience is that of food processing. Mrs Harsimrat Kaur Badal who joined as a minister for food processing that controls the nutraceuticals and food regulator, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, has expressed her excitement at being allotted this ministry. As per reports, she has mentioned that the area remains her interest and she wants to work for the benefit of farmers.

While the new group of ministers is being hailed as a powerful team, it remains to be seen how coordinated their moves will be. For certain policy decisions, even an objection from one quarter can scuttle the entire process. However, the good thing about this government is that it has a proactive prime minister with a decisive mandate to act.

Know your ministers:

â– Dr Harsh Vardhan, minister for health and family welfare

Dr Vardhan commands great administrative experience. He held the portfolios of education, health and law in the Delhi government between 1993 and 1998. In 1994, on a single day, he organized mass immunisation of 1.2 million children, displaying awesome logistics. The World Health Organisation recognized his contribution to society and awarded him the Director-General's Commendation Medal at a prestigious function held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in May 1998.

â– Dr Jitendra Singh, minister of state for science and technology (independent charge)

Dr Jitendra Singh completed his MBBS from Stanley Medical College Madras (Chennai) and MD (Medicine) from Government Medical College, Jammu. Dr Singh has served as chairman of the National Scientific Committee of Diabetes (RSSDI 2013). Besides, he has so far contributed over five thousand published articles in press including a widely syndicate column "Tales of Travesty", which was published in this newspaper on a regular basis. He is also the author of five books; Elsevier published monographs and over a dozen chapters in various text books of diabetes and medicine for MD students.

â– Mr Ananth Kumar, minister for chemicals and fertilizers

Mr Ananth Kumar is a Member of Parliament and has the distinction of having represented Bangalore South constituency of Karnataka for six times. He graduated in the faculty of Arts (BA) from K S Arts College at Hubli which is affiliated to Karnatak University and later, completed his bachelor's in law (LLB) from J S S Law College affiliated to Mysore University. He has served in the union cabinet of previous NDA government as the minister for Civil Aviation, Sports and Youth Affairs, Culture, Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation.

â– Mrs Harsimrat Kaur Badal, minister for food processing

Mrs Kaur is a graduate from Delhi University and pursued textile designing for three years after college. She has been associated with the 'Nanhi Chhaan' Foundation which works for the rights of the girl child and women empowerment. Her

other social activities include running a school for street children in Delhi's Vasant Kunj, supporting old age homes and sponsoring medical treatment for needy children. Before becoming a MP in 2009, Mrs Kaur had led a quiet family life. Despite not having any administrative experience, her political family background and enthusiasm as a young leader is expected to be her positive factor.

â– Mr Prakash Javadekar, minister for environment and forests

Mr Javadekar has been the spokesperson of BJP. A former banker, Mr Javadekar had his grooming for politics in Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the students wing of RSS. He was a member of the Maharashtra Legislative Council for two terms from 1990 to 2002 before being elected to Rajya Sabha in 2008. Hailing from Pune, Mr Javadekar, a commerce graduate has also been the party's in-charge of Andhra Pradesh.