

Year of biotech innovation

09 January 2008 | News



Year of biotech innovation

Innovation is the buzzword heard a lot within the biotech industry these days. In fact this was the underlying theme of the panel discussion on the newly-announced National Biotechnology Policy during the 5th BioSpectrum Awards Nite in Bangalore on December 21, 2007. The industry leaders urged the government or specifically the DBT to 'walk the talk' on policy. But more attention was reserved by the panelists on the need to foster innovation, to take advantage of the friendly policy regime.

For the biotech industry, innovation will no longer be just a fashionable. Survival and growth in the highly competitive economy will be determined by innovation. The government too is pushing for innovation to qualify for the promised financial goodies. As Dr Cyrus S Poonawalla and Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw emphasized during the discussion, the industry has to get out of the 'me-too' mentality and focus its energies to develop innovative products and services.

Many in the industry are already focusing on innovation. Bangalore-based Avesthagen, founded by Dr Viloo Morawala-Patell, is a prime example of this new trend. Avesthagen has been highlighting its 160 patents files in the last few years. The National Biotech Policy is nudging the industry towards this direction. A key initiative is the decision to fund special trusts formed by private biotech companies to take up risky product development along with industry and academic partners. The Policy has outlined the decision to underwrite the risks of product development taken by such research-focused trusts. This step alone, if implemented efficiently, will remove one of the major hurdles faced by companies grappling with the risks of early stage product development.

It is now up to the entrepreneurs to come up with innovative ideas. Dr Samir Brahmachari, the new chief of CSIR, rightly emphasized the need for the industry to take up the challenge. As a top researcher himself, Dr Brahmachari, rightly pointed out that the industry might not have the capacity to absorb the funds, which will be made available if there was no focus on innovation.

The Biotech Policy was announced on November 26, 2007 and so the December issue of BioSpectrum could only publish a few highlights with some quick comments from the industry. We have made up for it with an extensive coverage of different aspects of the policy with comments from industry leaders, policy makers like Dr MK Bhan and S&T Minister Kapil Sibal. Australia and Singapore have had a lot headway in promoting biotechnology industry, mainly through robust regulatory systems. India too is planning to set up an efficient biotech regulatory to enable the sector to realize its potential. This is the age of globalization and good ideas from anywhere in the world are worthy of consideration. So BioSpectrum has tried to capture the highlights of the biotech regulatory system in Australia and Singapore. Australia's first unified regulator, Dr Sue Meek, who heads the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator, created by the Gene Technology Act, a comprehensive legislation, has outlined the highlights of the Australian system in an exclusive interview to the magazine. Similarly, one of Singapore's leading scientists, Dr Edison Liu, who chairs the country's regulatory agency, has demystified Singapore's regulatory system in a guest column.

In the future issues, BioSpectrum will strive to bring many more such successful examples from around the world. And also take the lead to continue the debate on the Biotech Policy as DBT gets ready to ensure its smooth implementation in close coordination with the industry.

The year has started on a good note for the industry. I wish you all an eventful year ahead in 2008.

<sureshn@cybermedia.co.in>