

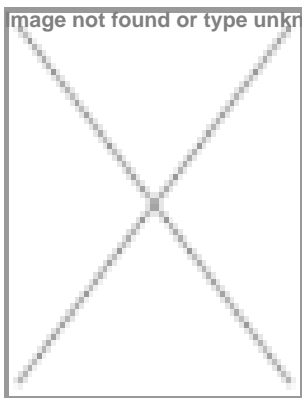
PM stresses on technology-aided agriculture to meet production targets

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Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh while addressing the convocation ceremony at the Govind Ballabh Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Uttarakhand, on June 19, 2010, said that policymakers and scientists need to put their heads together and work towards developing and implementing sustainable technologies that can produce more from less in the background of the warming and climate change.

He said that without solid support from agricultural scientists and technologists it would have been impossible to achieve the production targets. "There is a widespread feeling that there has not been any really big breakthrough in agricultural technologies since the green revolution of the late 1960s. This is a real challenge to the agricultural universities and our agricultural scientists in the country. India commands about 2.3 percent of the world's land area and about four percent of the earth's fresh water resources, but feeds about 17 percent of the world's population. This puts tremendous pressure on our resources and makes the need for newer and better technologies

even more critical," said Dr Singh.

While highlighting the government's efforts in this direction during the last six years, the Prime Minister said, "The central government has endeavored to give the highest priority to agriculture. A number of centrally sponsored programs have been started to increase investment and to tap the unused potential for achieving higher productivity and production."

Singh also spoke about the agricultural extension as another area which needs urgent attention, particularly from the state governments.

Avesthagen completes efficacy trials of Avent

Avesthagen has successfully completed the pre-clinical efficacy trial for one of its biosimilar drugs, Avent, at Biomedcode Hellas. The results indicate that Avent developed by Avesthagen is effective in addressing arthritic conditions.

Avent is the biosimilar version of a fully-humanized soluble tumor necrosis factor (TNF) receptor. Avent is indicated for reducing signs and symptoms, in patients with moderate to severe rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, plaque psoriasis, psoriatic arthritis and juvenile idiopathic arthritis.

Pre-clinical efficacy of Avent was carried out in a US FDA accredited human TNF transgenic murine model for rheumatoid arthritis. In these mice, the human TNF gene is over-expressed, which results in a progressive arthritic phenotype that is similar to that observed in humans. The results show that Avesthagen's biosimilar Avent was effective in preventing the arthritic pathology developing in the transgenic mice when compared to control mice.

Marked improvement was also evident in the group of mice treated with Avent in comparison to control group of mice, in all scores measured, namely statistically significant arthritis inhibition of about 60 percent in histopathology and about 80 percent with in-life clinical measurements.

Avesthagen has successfully developed a proprietary expression vector technology pAVGEN to generate high protein yielding mammalian cell lines. The Avent cell line have been developed using this proprietary technology. This product is currently being scaled up for clinical trials at Inno Biologics facility in Malaysia.

GEAC to consider commercialization of medicinal plants

India's biotech regulator, Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee in its meeting held on June 9, 2010, in Hyderabad, decided to consider the views from the Department of Ayush, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, GoI, on commercialization of transgenic medicinal plants.

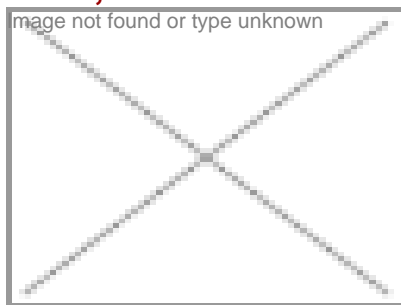
This decision was taken on a request by the Department of Ayush to the Ministry of Forest and Environment (MoEF) to co-opt the CEO of the National Medicinal Plants Board; adviser (Ayurveda) Department of Ayush; and DG of the Central Council for Research in Unani Medicine to the GEAC or to hear their concerns on commercialization of transgenic medicinal plants.

ICAR to promote agricultural R&D in hilly regions

For the first time since the establishment of first Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) at Pondicherry, India, in 1974, Dr S Ayyappan, secretary of the Department of Agricultural Research (DARE) and director general, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), had interaction with the program coordinators of 38 KVKs at the recently concluded 21st Regional Committee Meeting of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), India.

This three-day meeting held at the Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Jammu (SKUAST-J), from June 10-12, 2010, discussed the ways to promote research in the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

India, Denmark to strengthen biotech research collaboration



The Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Government of India, and the Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation have decided to further develop and strengthen the Danish-Indian research collaboration within the biotechnological area. In this regard, the DBT and the Danish program commission have invited researchers from universities, research institutions and private companies in India and Denmark that are conducting research within the biotechnology area to apply for funding of joint Indo-Danish strategic

The aim of this call is for the funded project to be able to deliver considerable and tangible results at the end of the project period. Hence, the criteria has been kept as joint proposals that must be based on existing collaborations in the form of co-publication, PhD exchange, project collaboration or other relevant research-related activities of significant strength and importance within the field of biotechnology. The project proposal has to be written jointly by an Indian and a Danish research group and specify unison and close collaboration.

The DBT and the program commission will support a joint strategic research project for a period of three-to-five years covering direct project costs. The total fund allocation is approximately Rs 11.42 crore. The final decision on which proposal

to support will be made public in December 2010. The funded research project is expected to start early 2011.

India extends its partnership with Germany in health research

To support the R&D projects in the fields of common interest, the Indian government represented by Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) and German government represented by the International Bureau of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (IB-BMBF at DLR), have invited proposals for Indo-German cooperation in health research.

The projects proposed to commence from February 1, 2011 include oncology, neurosciences, regenerative medicine and infectious diseases on the top priority. The scientists/faculty members working in regular capacity in universities, private/public R&D laboratories/institutes are eligible to apply under this program. The last date of submission of the form is set as June 30, 2010.

The purpose of the funding is to stimulate new collaborations like the preparation of joint projects under national funding programs. The program facilitates bilateral cooperation between the scientific communities in India and Germany through joint research projects, bilateral workshops/seminars, exchange visits of scientists, scientific delegations and composite (scientific and industrial) delegation. Both sides will explore the possibility of funding from the European Union research programs.

The ICMR, Department of Health Research (DHR), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, and the IB-BMBF at DLR, are the nodal implementing agencies from the Indian and German sides respectively.

OPPI releases code on conduct for clinical trials

In order to ensure that safety and well-being of research participants are fully-protected, Organization of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI) has set forth the code on conduct for clinical trials as guidance for member companies. In this regard, OPPI has recently released a booklet titled 'OPPI code on conduct of clinical trials'.

The key issues that have been addressed are protecting research participants, conduct of clinical trials, ensuring objectivity in research, and disclosure of clinical trial and its results.

The main purpose is to reinforce the commitment to the safety of research participants and to address issues that bear on this commitment in the context of clinical trials that enroll research participants and are designed, conducted or sponsored (partially or fully) by member companies.

The report has emphasized on the fact that the OPPI members conduct clinical trials in a manner that recognizes the importance of protecting the rights, safety and well-being of research participants. The interactions with research participants, as well as with clinical investigators and other persons/entities involved in clinical trials, recognize the fundamental principle and reinforce the precautions established to protect research participants.

The report also mentions that the investigator initiated studies, registries and any other organized data collection system like market research or health economic studies are outside the scope of this code unless collected as part of clinical trial.

Ansal to set up Rs 1,000 cr biotech park

Ansal API, an Indian real estate company, is planning to set up an 80-acre biotech park in Lucknow with an investment of Rs 1,000 crore. The proposed biotech firm, expected to be launched by year-end, would house around 42 biotech firms and a central processing zone with state-of-the-art facilities including high-tech labs.

According to sources, Ansal API is in talks with Biocon and few other overseas companies, to set up the central processing zone. The realty firm is also keen on an exclusive tie-up with a single company to set up this zone, which is proposed to function as a common resource pool for all other firms in the park.

Biotech Consortium of India Limited (BCIL), a consultancy firm jointly promoted by the Department of Biotechnology, financial institutions like the ICICI, IDBI among others and corporate firms such as Ranbaxy Labs, Lupin Labs, has been commissioned to draw up a detailed business plan for the project. This venture would be located amidst the sprawling Sushant Golf City, a township project of Ansal API spread across around 3,500 acre in Lucknow, India.

The total investment in the park is in the range of Rs 1,500-2,000 crore, of which Ansal's investment is likely to be in the range of Rs 800-1,000 crore, inclusive of the land cost. While a large chunk of investment involves the land bank that the

company already owns, the rest of it is expected to be invested by companies that become partners in the project.

‘Jammu & Kashmir is capable of becoming a biopharma hub’: Omar Abdullah

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Addressing a one-day workshop on ‘Bio-Pharma Hub: Advantage Jammu and Kashmir’ organized by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), Omar Abdullah urged for involving local entrepreneurs in exploring uses of this sector for setting up small and medium industrial units.

“You need to engage local entrepreneurs to make necessary dent in this field and begin the activities utilizing the raw material abundantly available across the state. Before going for bigger, we started on smaller and medium scale,” suggested Abdullah.

Abdullah added that he is hopeful that ASSOCHAM would focus on encouraging and associating local players in its efforts and intention of utilizing Jammu and Kashmir’s advantage as biopharma hub. “We have a high-class talent pool present in the state. Upgradation and creation of skills and similar sectors is needed.”

Surjit Singh Slathia, the Minister for Industries and Commerce, Jammu & Kashmir, said, “In the recent years, a large number of big and small pharma companies have shown interest in the state and investment for the sector is in the pipeline. We are trying to rope in investment worth Rs 1,500 crore in pharma sector, which in turn would generate about 3,000 jobs.”

Slathia also added that J&K is a rich depository of medicinal plants which could be utilized for biopharma products of various ranges.

India to establish AcSIR to enhance innovation

On June 18, 2010, the Government of India, approved a proposal of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) for setting up of an Academy of Scientific and Innovative Research (AcSIR) in the country.

It will function as an institution for imparting instruction and awarding degrees in frontier areas of science and technology. The bill to set up the academy will be introduced during monsoon session of parliament.

The academy will primarily focus on research and imparting training in such areas that are not ordinarily provided by existing universities in India. The curricula, pedagogy and evaluation will be innovative and directed towards creating the highest quality personnel in cross-disciplinary areas.

While utilizing existing resources and facilities of CSIR, the academy will operate on a self-sustaining mode. The recurring expenses will be Rs 19.10 crore in the 11th Plan and Rs 61.79 crore in the 12th Plan.

The main purpose behind setting up the academy is the decline in the number of PhD holders. The academy will be headquartered in Noida, and will produce 1,000 PhDs in science and technology and 120 in engineering every year after the five years of its commencement.

The academy will also have campuses in 37 CSIR laboratories that are re-linked with the National Knowledge Network. CSIR has a pool of 4,500 scientists from different areas of science and it is expected that it could deploy 2,500 of them for the works in the academy.