

Neem sequence database to be made public soon

15 March 2013 | News | By BioSpectrum Bureau

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When Ganit Labs, a fledging public-private partnership had sequenced *Azadirachta indica*, more commonly known as the humble Indian plant neem in late 2011, it was lauded as a remarkable achievement done by an Indian lab. However, what differentiated it from other such discoveries was the fact that the sequencing information was going to be made available to the public.

[Click here to read more about Ganit Labs' achievement of sequencing Neem genome](#)

Now, more than a year later, Ganit Labs is ready to launch the online portal with the valuable information in the form of a sequence database. The portal will house partially annotated data. Dr Binay Panda, head, Ganit Labs, says that completing the annotation is not their priority right now. "We want to focus on secondary metabolites of the plant and especially the genes and pathways involved in producing them. We want to primarily explore the synthetic biology aspect, and use this information to understand and utilize the antiseptic and insecticidal properties of neem." The raw data surrounding the sequencing effort has already been published and can be accessed online.

Ganit Labs is a public private partnership between Strand Life Sciences and the Institute of Bioinformatics and Applied Biotechnology (IBAB). The Government of India had solicited proposals to develop a BioIT lab in India a few years ago. The government of Karnataka and Strand Life Sciences were chosen to be a part of this initiative. It received Rs 10 crore from the Department of Information Technology, Government of India, and Rs 5 crore from the Government of Karnataka. Strand Life Sciences too invested Rs 5 crore worth in software and marketing services rendered.

Apart from the Neem project, Ganit Labs is also working on mapping the epigenetic changes that take place in different stages of oral cancer, a major health problem found in India. The aim behind this is to be able to use preliminary information of markers in oral cancer in developing a diagnostic to detect oral cancer early.

Dr Panda believes that the information, which will be freely available should enthruse students and researchers to further work

on enhancing our understanding of the existing data. "I think we should let people exploit the data. CSIR's Open Source Drug Discovery (OSDD) program is an excellent example of a crowd sourcing initiative. We don't have the size comparable to that, however, it is an excellent example to emulate."