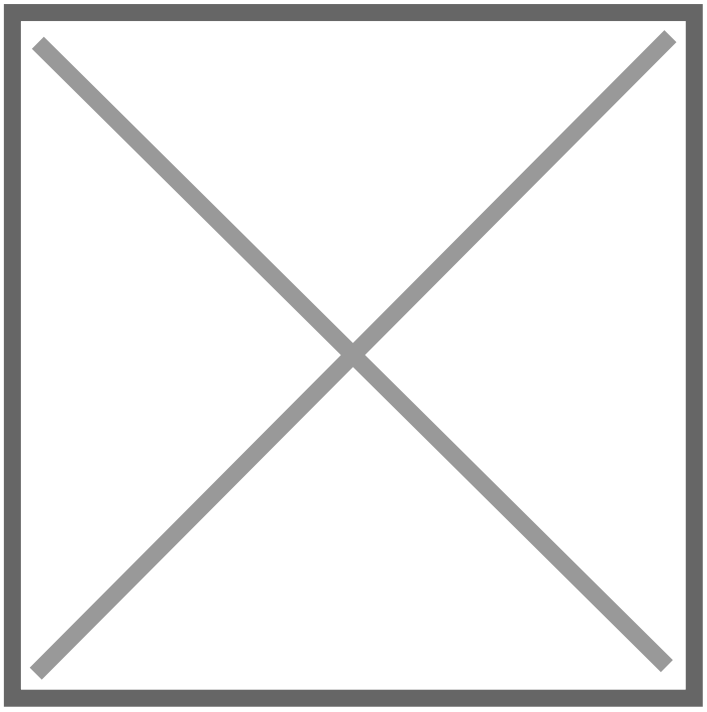
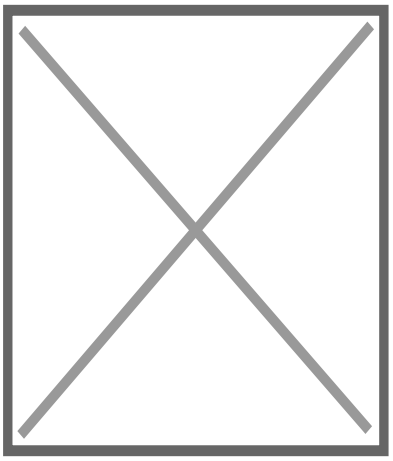
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India @ BIO 2005

07 July 2005 | News





N Suresh

India's biotechnology is undergoing a major transition. Though small by global reckoning with just $1 billion in revenues out of $91 billion, India's biotech players are demonstrating that size need not be a constraint. Determination and strategy is what will count.

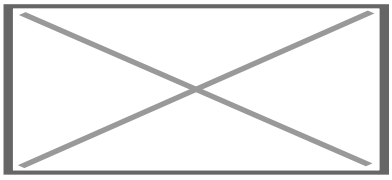
This was ably demonstrated by the small but effective Indian biotech contingent at the BIO 2005 annual convention in Philadelphia. India's strategy was clear: make the country an attractive destination to pharma and biotech majors looking for partners to drastically reduced the ever-increasing drug development costs. Experts estimate that it costs anywhere from $800 million to $1.2 billion to bring a new drug to the market, due to rigorous regulatory scrutiny. Come to India, and the developments could be reduced by a third at least, without compromising on quality. The presence of globally watched Indian pharma sector, the confidence given by the India Brand built by software companies and the interest levels in Indian biotech by key players like Gates Foundation, UNICEF and WHO to keep global medicine procurement costs down is providing the Indian biotech sector a unique opportunity.

This mantra was reiterated by the Indian delegation, led by S&T Minister Kapil Sibal and DBT Secretary MK Bhan at every forum in the US. Global biotech community too is doing its own "due diligence" on its own and everything seems to be falling in place. With the product patents regime in place and only data exclusivity the major irritant, India is being looked at as a favorable biotech destination. India is attractive because it is a role model for other developing countries, remarked an

influential industry watcher Susan Finston at a meeting between the Indian and US industry in Washington DC.

There is every reason to build on this momentum. The government is doing everything it can to promote biotech. But a few more things will help. Apart from the 50 states in the US, the other major participants at the world's largest biotech gathering were mainly European countries. The Asian brigade was small, represented only by India, Japan, Taiwan, Australia, Malaysia and Singapore. For the Indian biotech startups, the costs are too prohibitive at this stage to be present at BIO and tap the opportunities. The DBT should devise a scheme to enable the participation of small biotech companies in the next BIO convention slated for April 2006 in Chicago and ensure that the momentum built at Philadelphia is carried on to its logical conclusion.

BIO was remarkable for another aspect. It chose to honor Senator Birch Bayh, who was responsible for the creation of the biotech sector by providing a legislative legitimacy to commercialize amazing innovations developed at huge public costs but locked up in government vaults in the US. Indian government too has invested thousands of crores of rupees in public research institutions. An Indian version of the Bayh-Dole Act may do wonders to spur the spirit of entrepreneurship among the scientific community and escalate the growth of the technology sector, inlcuding biotechnology. India's legislative initiatives are driven by the government. Can we hope for a Kapil Sibal-M K Bhan Act to rewrite the way research is done in India and celebrate its success in 2020, at BIO India?



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