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India and Japan join hands for stem cell research

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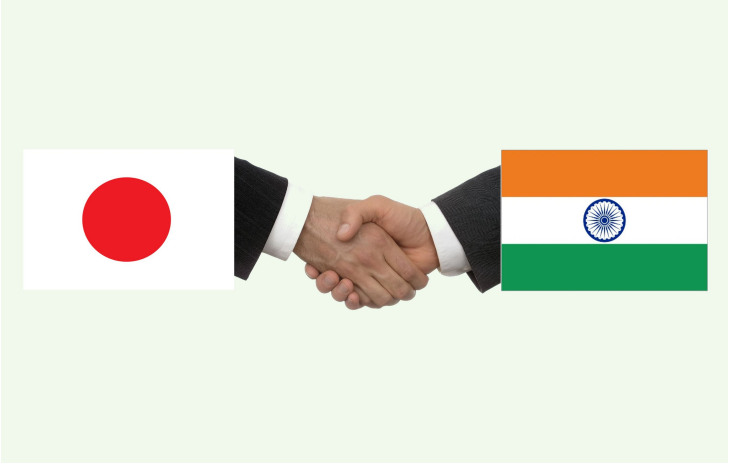

In the light of Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to India, the two countries have signed a host of agreements to further cooperation in science and technology, including research into stem-cells for making bone-marrow transplants more accessible.

The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) already has an India-Japan cooperative programme that has Christian Medical College & Hospital, Vellore, and Kyoto University, Japan, as participants.

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The aim of the programme is to develop infrastructure and expertise for India to be a competitive force in regenerative medicine and induced pluripotent stem cell biology. The focus of the collaboration is on developing treatments for sickle-cell anaemia, Beta thalassemia and brain disorders, and creating a haplobank relevant to Indian populations.

A haplobank refers to a specially maintained collection of embryonic cells that can, in theory, be directed to become any kind of cell and thus progenitor of replacement organs.

Japanese scientist Shinya Yamanaka was a co-recipient of the Nobel Prize for medicine for discovering ways to reprogram mature stem cells.