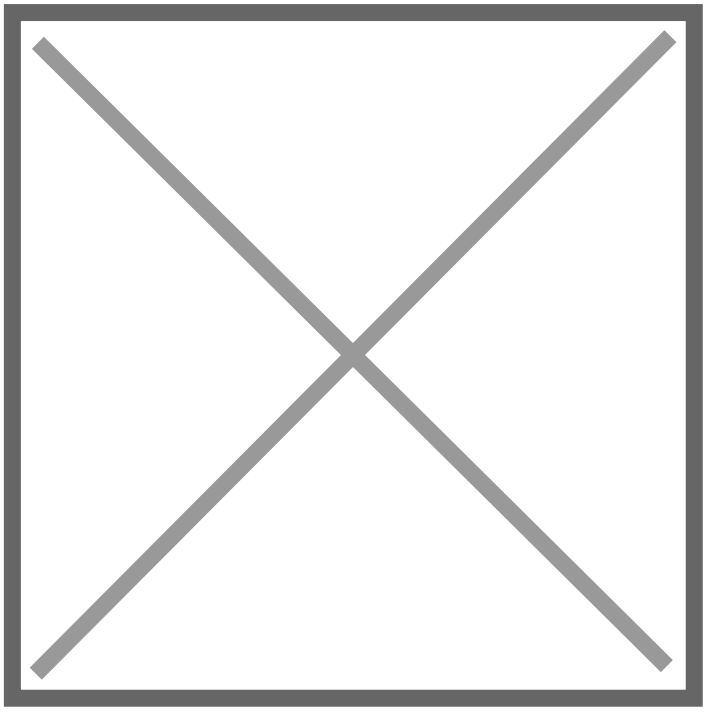
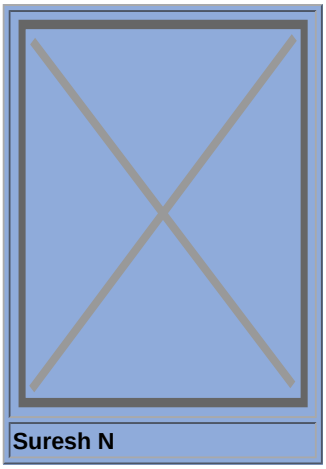
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Working In Tandem

10 May 2005 | News





Suresh N

"When it comes to economic development, we look at India as one," quipped Karnataka Chief Minister N Dharam Singh. This was in response to Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje's open appeal to the hundreds of biotech leaders in Bangalore to take a serious look at her desert state as a biotech destination and she had reeled out an impressive list of statistics. She may have been from a political party which is a bitter rival of Singh's Congress party. But the genial Singh offered Karnataka's expertise to help Rajasthan in the sunrise biotech sector. He was not just playing the genuine host at the fifth edition of Bangalore Bio where the Rajasthan CM was the chief guest. The Karnataka CM was just reflecting the spirit of bonhomie that prevails in the biotech sector.

The Rajasthan CM was just of one the two dozen leaders who have come looking to India and particularly the southern states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh in recent months, to explore opportunities for bio partnering. Raje's party colleague and her Chhattisgarh counterpart Raman Singh too followed her to Bangalore to seek help to make his place the Genome State. Bangalore and Hyderabad were seen as rivals in IT and now in biotech. But top AP officials mingled easily with the participants at Bangalore Bio, pitching hard for their state. So was a team from Tamil Nadu. Of course, only Kerala Chief Minister Oommen Chandy failed to capitalize on the invitation to inaugurate the conference, perhaps weighed down by the ongoing political tussle in his state.

Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao was in Bangalore before meeting India's top political leaders in New Delhi. Delegations from the UK and German had come in full strength. Crown Prince Philippe of Belgium was here a few weeks ago. And the Pakistani President's biotech advisory has been playing a key role in developing a biotech handshake between the countries. Leaders of many Scandinavian countries too have come in recent weeks to have a look at southern India.

The spirit of cooperation and not competition is good for this sector. Bio-partnering is something that will be a win-win for everyone. And this has been the theme the industry leaders have been highlighting around the world. Any tip is enough to forge a relationship. A Western Australia government's representative highlighted his state's eagerness to do bio-business with India because his state and India shared the India Ocean's shores, besides interest in cricket, being the home of Aussie captain Ricky Ponting!

Globally, biotech has been developing in clusters around top educational institutions and technology research centers and industry groupings. It is happening in India too with six to eight promising clusters. Each cluster could develop a few areas of expertise and build on it and healthy competition will keep every one on their toes.

Meanwhile, DBT chief Dr M K Bhan has embarked on a nationwide consultative process to get inputs on the draft National Biotech Policy. And his counterpart at the Department of Science and Technology (DST) is also doing a lot seeking industry suggestions to help the biopharma sector to develop innovative projects. The Manmohan Singh government has given an extra Rs 150 crore for the Pharma Fund administered by the DST and promised even more every year for all the good project ideas.

It is an excellent opportunity to budding entrepreneurs and owners of innovative ideas to prepare their project plans to rush to the DST.

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