

Risk takers and innovators need to be encouraged

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What is your take on the current status of Indian biotechnology industry?

Indian companies have proved their capabilities in biogenerics manufacturing. What we need now are right technologies. India is two decades behind in the race of biotechnology. India has all the needed ingredients for success. It has efficiency to meet production needs, good manufacturing practices and knowledge base. Being relatively new entrant in biotechnology, India can do things differently. Though Indian industry has abundant potential, there is too much of expectation, and one may allow scope and time for the industry to show its worth.

Is biotechnology in India over-regulated?

Regulation is a universal phenomenon. Regulations should be there in every industry. Each country will have its own degree of regulation, but ultimately, it's for the benefit of industry. There can be complexities in framing and following regulations as the field is evolving. India is moving ahead in evaluating its own regulations and making necessary changes that can facilitate growth. Dr. Mashelkar's recommendations are rightly adopted in the case of recombinant products, and it is just a beginning.

Do you think there is a need to have exclusive funds from the Centre for to boost biotech R&D;?

The biotechnology industry is getting its share in the pharma R&D; fund. Though there is no need for duplication of such effort, an innovation fund can be considered by the Department of Biotechnology, Government of India. India needs to encourage risk takers and innovation.

Biotech equipment is largely imported, currently. How do you look at this situation?

Import of equipment that are used in biotechnology industry needs substitutes within India. The country has able institutions that can develop useful instruments. As of today, about 90 per cent of equipment used are imported and we need to look for alternative sources. Institutions like NCL-Pune, IICT-Hyderabad can develop such equipments. Integration of industries and institutions is the need of the hour.

What about venture capital funding for biotech industries...

Unless biotech companies have innovative ideas and approach, venture capital companies are not going to support them. The VCs don't mind investing in right companies. APIDC-VCL based at Hyderabad is an example, which has been the front-runner in identifying and encouraging innovative ideas and concepts. The Small Business Innovation Research Initiative (SBIRI), launched by the Department of Biotechnology will boost public-private-partnership effort in the country. The distinctive feature of SBIRI is that it supports the high risk pre-proof-of-concept research and late stage development in small and medium companies lead by innovators with science backgrounds which is unique in nature to support private industries and to get them involved in development of such products and processes which have high societal relevance.

Is the national biotech policy going to put India on the global map? Is the policy encouraging enough?

The draft national biotech policy is just a beginning. Industry will have to coordinate with the Government in making necessary changes or modifications as time demands, in future. A specific framework is being created and it's everyone's job to strengthen the policy. I recommend state policies should be integrated with the national biotech policy. Already states such as Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka and few others have created policies and each state should develop a policy and then get integrated policies and each state should develop a policy and then get integrated with the national policy.

Where do you see Indian biotech industry in 2010?

I want to see Indian biotech companies as real innovative companies by 2010, having their own distinguished identity in each area of their specialization. Indian companies would be able not only penetrate into global markets but also will sell their products meeting needs of developed, developing and poor nations. India will surely become a developed nation.