

Government of India
Ministry of Science and Technology
Department of Biotechnology

Monthly Cabinet Summary, April-2020

I. Important policy decisions taken and major achievements during the month:

(i) Measures adopted by DBT in fight against COVID-19

- 1. DBT City/Regional Clusters for COVID-19:** Department has established city/Regional clusters to scale-up the testing of COVID-19 samples in government institutions across the country in a Hub and Spoke model. Institutes and Laboratories which have the capacity and expertise for both Sample collection, handling/processing (BSL-2 facility) and testing (RT-PCR) serve as the hubs and they will involve a number of laboratories which have RT-PCR machines and the requisite manpower as their extended Testing facilities. The Hubs are Government laboratories approved by respective Ministries /Departments (DBT, DST, CSIR, DAE, DRDO, ICAR etc) as per ICMR guidelines. Sixteen City/Regional clusters have been established–Bangalore, Delhi/NCR, Hyderabad, Thiruvananthapuram, Chandigarh/Mohali, Bhubaneshwar, Nagpur, Pune, Mumbai, Lucknow, Chennai, Kolkata, North Eastern Region, Jammu & Kashmir, Ahmedabad and Madhya Pradesh. More than 90 institutions are at present doing the sample testing and over 80,000 samples have been tested. It is expected to scale-up testing up to 1 lakh samples/day.
- 2. Covid Med-Tech Manufacturing & Development Strategy (CoMMAND Strategy):** Department is facilitating supply of kits, PPEs and reagents to DBT City/Regional Clusters for COVID-19 by coordinating on their requirements with Andhra Pradesh Med-Tech Zone (AMTZ) which has initiated manufacturing of all the components required for testing. Under the Covid Med-Tech Manufacturing & Development Strategy (CoMMAND Strategy), AMTZ is expected to scale-up production capacity of kits up to 1 lakh kits/day by the month of June
- 3. Special Call on COVID-19 Research Consortium under National Biopharma Mission:** DBT and its Public Sector Undertaking, Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), announced a COVID-19 Research Consortium Call soliciting applications for development of Diagnostics, Vaccines, Novel Therapeutics, Repurposing of Drugs or any other intervention to combat COVID-19. The first phase of the call closed on 30th Mar 2020, as part of which four hundred sixty three (463) proposals were received, seventy (70) proposals have been recommended for funding support based on a multi-tiered review process and other proposals are under review. Among the vaccine projects recommended under National Biopharma Mission (NBM), funding support to Cadila Healthcare Ltd for advancing the development of a DNA Vaccine candidate and to Bharat Biotech International Ltd for COVID-19 vaccine candidate utilising the inactivated rabies vector platform, along with support to Serum Institute of India Private Limited (SIPL) for the Phase III human clinical trials study of recombinant BCG vaccine (VPM1002) are some of the major highlights. The consortium

has also funded manufacture of ventilators, testing kits and thermal scanners on large scale at the AP MedTech Zone.

4. First Hub: Facilitation of innovation and regulations for start-ups and innovators:

FIRST HUB is a facilitation unit set up by DBT at BIRAC to address the queries of Innovators. With regards to prevailing situation around globe, special FIRST HUB COVID-19 sessions are being held every Friday to solve the queries of innovators. Representatives from CDSCO, ICMR, NIB, GeM, KIHT, BIS, DBT and BIRAC are available to answer to the queries on Regulatory Pathways, Funding Opportunities, Public Procurement, IVD testing and validation, Standards and Specifications, Manufacturing and testing infrastructure support. First session was done on 3rd April 2020 and so far four sessions have been conducted. During these sessions around 60 queries were discussed and addressed by the experts. In addition, on demand of various research parks, Incubators and Industry associations, a 45-minute webinar was conducted on 17th April 2020, which received more than 250 registrations from the participants.

5. Three Joint Meetings of the Empowered Technology Group (ETG) and the PMO constituted **Task Force for Focused Research on Corona Vaccine** and other Science and Technology issues, under the Co-Chairmanship of Dr. Vinod Paul, Member (Health), NITI Aayog and Prof. K. Vijay Raghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India, were held in April, 2020. The Department of Biotechnology has been tasked as the central coordinating agency for vaccine development. Department has provided a landscape of national and global efforts of COVID-19 vaccine development to the PMO constituted Task Force.

6. Multiple autonomous institutes of DBT are working on development of vaccine candidates, diagnostics, therapeutics, genomic analysis, animal models and other resources to combat COVID-19. Several meetings have been convened by the Secretary DBT with the Directors of autonomous institutes to discuss the next steps, deliverables and the timelines of the research efforts proposed.

7. A meeting of Hon'ble Minister of Science & Technology, Health and Family Welfare and Earth Sciences with Autonomous Institutes (AIs) & Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) of Department of Biotechnology was held on 28th April, 2020. During the meeting an overview of activities related to COVID-19 Research Consortium at DBT AIs and PSUs was presented.

8. An improved Brucella vaccine vs3 modified delta S19 vaccine developed by ICAR-IVRI under a network programme on bovine brucellosis which has been supported by Department has been evaluated successfully in buffalo and efforts are on to transfer the technology to industries with ICAR/DARE.

(ii) Biosafety and regulations

1. The division has conducted 182nd meeting of Review Committee of Genetic Manipulation (RCGM) on 7th April, 2020. During the meeting, the Committee considered 28 applications including information items submitted by the various applicants. After deliberation on each application, appropriate decision was taken by the RCGM.

2. **54 Institutional Biosafety Committee** were constituted on IBKP portal. Considering current COVID 19 situations, notification allowing IBSCs to hold meeting through video conferencing was issued.
3. **Interim Guidance Document on Laboratory Biosafety to Handle COVID-19 Specimens:** To provide guidance on laboratory biosafety (in tune with the international norms) to be followed in handling and processing clinical samples/infectious virus for diagnostic testing and R&D work to develop new diagnostics/therapeutics for COVID-19, the Department issued an “**Interim Guidance Document on Laboratory Biosafety to Handle COVID-19 Specimens**”.
4. **Rapid Response Regulatory process for COVID-19 related research and development:** Permission on Fast Track basis for undertaking R & D on COVID 19 was issued to seven applicants.
5. **DGFT Cases:** The comments of the Department were communicated to DGFT on three application seeking permission for export of SCOMET (Special Chemicals, Organisms, Materials, Equipment and Technologies) items. Comments were provided to Ministry of External Affairs on the revision of SCOMET list.

(iii) **Technology/products developed by the Autonomous Institutes**

- a. A method for the production of resistant starch from starch biomass employing a novel type-1 pullulanase from a hot spring metagenome
- b. Novel DNA Aptamers Against Spike Protein Of SARS-Cov-2
- c. Novel Autophagy inducing peptides, their composition and process for manufacturing.
- d. Immunodominant Protein and Peptide-Based Brucellosis Diagnosis Kits and Devices to Differentiate Infected Animals from Brucellaabortus S19 Vaccinated Animals

- (iv) During the month **57 research publications** and **5 patents** (1 granted and 4 filed) were reported by the Autonomous Institutes of the Department.

II. Compliance Report on Important Matters/Issues

(i) **Important policy matters held up on account of prolonged inter ministerial consultations: N/A**

(ii) **Compliance of Cabinet/Cabinet Committee decisions: N/A**

No. of COS decisions pending for compliance	Proposed action plan/timelines for compliance of COS decisions	Remarks
NIL	02	NIL

(iii) **No. of cases of ‘sanction for prosecution’ pending for more than three months: Nil**

(iv) **Particulars of cases in which there has been a departure from the Transaction of Business: Nil**

(v) **Rules or established policy of the Government: N/A**

(vi) **Status of implementation of e-governance:**

Total No. of active files: 8017	Total No. of e-files generated during April, 2020: 144
--	---

(vii) **Status of Public Grievances:**

No. of Public Grievances redressed during month: 225	No. of Public Grievances pending at the end of the month: 13
---	---

(viii) **Information on the specific steps taken by the Ministry/ Department for utilization of the Space, Technology based tools and application in Governance and Development: Nil**

(ix) **Confirmation that the incumbency details of all posts in the Ministry/Department and its organizations falling under the purview of the ACC have been updated on AVMS:** It is confirmed that the incumbency details of all the posts in the Ministry/Department (both Autonomous institutes and PSUs under DBT) falling under the purview of the ACC have been updated on AVMS.

(x) **Status regarding compliance of the directions of ACC. A paragraph on Cases in which the ACC directions have not been compiled with distinct heading:** It is confirmed that the directions of ACC are complied with.

(xi) **Status of cases where recommendations from PESB have been received but the proposals are yet to be submitted to the ACC Secretariat:** It is stated that the same may be treated as ‘Nil’

(xii) **Status of Government e- Marketplace (GeM):** No Procurement has been made through GeM for the month of April.