

Government of India
Ministry of Science and Technology
Department of Biotechnology

Monthly Cabinet Summary, December -2020

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

(i) National Biotechnology Development Strategy

To envision the goals for the entire biotech sector in the country be it education, research, entrepreneurship, industry development, a 5-year strategy with goals and implementation plan is being drafted with the help of eminent experts.

For drafting of the NBDS 2021-25, a committee was constituted, so far 2 meetings were held and final draft is being formulated for approval.

(ii) Measures taken by DBT to address concerns related to COVID-19

a. Mission COVID Suraksha – The Indian COVID-19 Vaccine Development Mission

The proposal for “Mission COVID Suraksha – The Indian COVID-19 Vaccine Development Mission” to be implemented at a total cost of Rs. 900 Cr. for 12 months by BIRAC, a PSU of DBT, was duly approved by Hon’ble Finance Minister. Release of the first tranche of the grant is in process. Also, three Requests for Expression of Interests for COVID-19 vaccine development and supporting ecosystem were issued by DBT-BIRAC focusing on (1) Development of COVID-19 Vaccine Candidates, (2) Enhancement of Capacity to support COVID-19 Vaccine development and(3) Enhancing capacity for conduct of Human clinical trial for COVID-19 Vaccine Candidates. The review and evaluation of the proposals received under Mission COVID Suraksha was conducted in the meetings of the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) held on 18th December, 2020 and 23rd December, 2020.

b. Partnerships for Accelerating Clinical Trials (PACT) initiative

The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) has initiated the Partnerships for Accelerating Clinical Trials (PACT) initiative. Under the PACT programme, DBT is working closely with the Ministry of External Affairs to strengthen capacities for facilitating phase III clinical trials of COVID vaccines in neighbouring / friendly nations. Under the initiative, the following activities are being undertaken:

- Trainings for strengthening clinical trial research capacity in neighbouring countries, under the aegis of the Ind-CEPI Mission.
- Facilitating phase III clinical trials of Indian COVID vaccines in neighbouring and friendly countries.

The 4th module under the ‘Trainings for Strengthening Clinical Research Capacity in Neighbouring Countries’ of the Partnerships for Accelerating Clinical Trials (PACT) Initiative, concluded with an exit exam on 11th December, 2020, with 44 participants from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Mauritius, Nepal, Srilanka. The

trainings are being organised by Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) and Clinical Development Services Agency (CDSA).

Senior Officials from DBT-BIRAC coordinated with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) for visit of delegation of Heads of Missions, on 9th December, 2020, to Bharat Biotech and Biological E, leading biotechnology companies in Hyderabad involved in COVID-19 vaccine development. The discussions were held on Indian R&D facilities, manufacturing capacity, foreign collaborations in the field of pharmaceuticals including vaccine production and ongoing clinical trials.

c. National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI)

DBT participated in 15th NTAGI meeting held on 10th December 2020, whereby issues for interchangeability of Leprosy vaccine, introduction of Japanese Encephalitis vaccine, implementation reports of Rotavirus vaccine and efforts for COVID-19 vaccines were discussed. The Department also participated in the 11th and 12th Meeting of the COVID -19 Working Group of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) was held on 8th and 16th December, 2020, whereby emergency use options for COVID-19 vaccines and Geographic variation in the outcome of COVID-19 Disease and Contraindications of use of COVID-19 Vaccines were discussed.

d. ACT Accelerator (ACT-A) Facilitation Council

DBT participated in the third meeting of the ACT Accelerator (ACT-A) Facilitation Council (FC) which was held on 14th December, 2020, whereby, discussion was held on prioritization of the activities under the ACT-A and the financing framework to address critical funding gaps.

e. Joint Working Group of the Indo-US Vaccine Action programme

A business meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) of the Indo-US Vaccine Action programme (VAP), a bilateral program of the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India; and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), was held on 15th December, 2020. The progress of the various bilateral initiatives being implemented under the auspices of VAP was reviewed in the meeting. A special session on COVID-19 vaccine development efforts in India and USA, was also held during the meeting.

f. The City /Regional clusters have been established in a Hub and Spoke model to scale-up testing of COVID-19 samples in government institutions across the country. The Hubs are Government laboratories approved by respective Ministries /Departments (DBT, DST, CSIR, DAE, DRDO, ICAR etc) as per ICMR guidelines. So far 21 City /Regional clusters have been established and over 23.51 lakh samples have been tested.

To further enable testing access to rural India, the I-lab (infectious disease lab)-mobile lab for Covid testing launched by Hon'ble Minister on 18th Jun 2020 has performed about 10025 tests in the Faridabad region. Three more labs are expected

to be deployed through participation of various State Governments. DBT has provided manpower support to all the hubs to continue testing.

(iii) New projects funded based on RFP in any specific area

- a. DBT and BIRAC announced a joint call for proposals- COVID-19 research consortium. A total of 120 proposals received from academia pertaining to diagnostics, were reviewed for support through dedicated Area Review Panels (ARP) meetings 17 recommended proposals are being processed for financial support. 16 projects have been sanctioned on diagnostics development.
- b. Six proposals have been recommended under a joint call on 'Artificial intelligence for advancing healthcare across India and Sweden' by the Indo-Swedish Joint committee review.

(iv) Societal outreach of DBT

a. 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 alternate Friday to solve the queries of innovators. For the month of December, session for COVID-19 was conducted on Dec 11th, 2020 and over 7 queries clarified. Representatives from CDSCO, ICMR, NIB, GeM, KIHT, BIS, DBT and BIRAC were available to take queries on Regulatory Pathways, Funding Opportunities, Public Procurement, IVD testing and validation, Standards and Specifications, Manufacturing and testing infrastructure support.

- b. E-brochure/catalog on IVDs manufactured by Indian manufacturers for covid has been compiled and countries in South-east Asia are in contact with DBT for export of the reagents and kits for covid diagnosis.
- c. DBT Autonomous Institutions conducted 'VigyanYatra' as part of curtain raiser event of India International Science Festival 2020 (IISF-2020) Celebrations.

(v) International Cooperation

- a) An expert committee meeting for review and shortlisting of applications received under Newton-Bhabha PhD Placement programme 2020-21 was held on 8th December 2020. The candidature of shortlisted applicants was further discussed at a Joint Panel meeting with the British Council on 14th December 2020 for the final list of candidates to be supported under the programme. The selected Indian research scholars will be supported to undertake a 2-4 month research placement at a UK university/institution.
- b) A virtual meeting was held between Dr. Renu Swarup, Secretary DBT; and Prof. Dame Ottoline Leyser, Chief Executive, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI); and Prof. Melanie Welham, Executive Chair, Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), UK on 15 December 2020. The current funding scenario and future opportunities for bilateral partnerships were discussed at this meeting.

c) Memorandum of Understanding on Research Cooperation between The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and The Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) has been approved for signing

(vi) Publications & Patents

There have been **2** research publications and **3** patents filed by the Autonomous Institutes of the Department.

(vii) Technology developed/Commercialized through R&D projects supported by DBT as well as AIs of DBT: 1

a. The Department of Biotechnology (DBT), licensed a medical device technology ETURNAL – An Intelligent Automatic Patient Turning System, developed under the School of International Biodesign (SiB) Programme to Start-up Company M/s. Cureous Pvt. Ltd., Bengaluru on 31st December 2020.

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
-	-	-

(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) Status of implementation of e-governance:

Total No. of active files: 11,752	Total No. of e-files generated during December, 2020: 407
-----------------------------------	---

(vi) Status of Public Grievances:

No. of Public Grievances redressed during month: 31	No. of Public Grievances pending at the end of the month: 37
--	---

(vii) 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

(viii) a. 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.

b. 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.

c. 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'

(ix) Status of Government e- Marketplace (GeM):

Procurement made by the department through GeM for the month of December, 2020 is Rs. 8,61,764.00