Weekly Inputs on DBT’s efforts to Combat COVID-19

28th May, 2021
OVERVIEW

Taking note of the unprecedented scenario of the COVID19 pandemic, the Department of Biotechnology prepared a roadmap early on with a focus on diagnosis, treatment and most importantly, prevention. DBT, its Autonomous Institutions (AIs) and the Public Sector Undertaking Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), have been working relentlessly over the past one year to develop effective interventions for combating the pandemic.

Highlights of major activities include:

• **Support for >100 projects**
in the thematic areas of vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics.

  **Enabling 7 vaccine candidates**
  by industry and
  **8 candidates**
  by academia.

• Mission COVID Suraksha being implemented to accelerate Indian COVID vaccine development and augment vaccine manufacturing capacities.

  Supporting

  **5 vaccine candidates,**
  **19 clinical trial sites,**
  **6 facilities for immunogenicity assays and animal challenge models.**

• THSTI bio-assay laboratory recognized by Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), under their network of

  **7 global laboratories.**

• Organizing training programs for strengthening clinical trial capacities in neighboring countries under

  **PACT initiative**

• **COVID 19 testing at 9 DBT AIs,**
  approved as Hubs for their respective City/Regional clusters.

• Rapid scale-up of manufacturing of indigenous COVID-19 diagnostic kits with a production capacity of about

  **15 Lakh kits/day**
  and deployment of nation’s first infectious disease mobile laboratory in Haryana.
Major updates on the COVID-19 related activities of DBT for the period from May 21, 2021 to May 28, 2021 are placed below:

**DBT’S EFFORTS TO COMBAT COVID-19 – MAJOR UPDATES OF THE WEEK AT A GLANCE**

### VACCINES

- Under Mission COVID Suraksha, out of the total 66 applications received against the three published Requests for Expression of Interest (REOI), 30 proposals are being supported (5 projects pertaining to candidate vaccine development, 6 proposals under capacity enhancement and 19 projects for strengthening clinical trial capacities). Execution of Grant-in-Aid Letter Agreement and disbursement of funds to the grantees is in progress.

- Capacity enhancement of 03 Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), viz., Indian Immunologicals Limited (IIL), Haffkine Biopharmaceuticals and Bharat Immunologicals and Biologicals Corporation Limited (BIBCOL), is being supported under Mission COVID Suraksha, in an effort to ramp-up Covaxin production. Transfer of Technology from Bharat Biotech to the 03 PSUs and to Gujarat Biotech research Consortium (GBRC) is underway and is being monitored on a weekly basis. In respect of BIBCOL and Gujarat Biotech Research Consortium (GBRC), the technology transfer MoU has been finalized with BBIL. The MoU between Haffkine Biopharma and BBIL is expected to be executed soon.

- Regarding manufacturing of Sputnik V in India, Dr. Reddy's has been identified to facilitate knowledge sharing between the manufacturing partners, as well as, to facilitate support and guidance from Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), to resolve issues pertaining to technology transfer and scaling up of production.
The domestic production of Sputnik V is expected to begin by August, 2021. Further, RDIF is expected to supply 3 million doses of Sputnik V, to India, by June, 2021.

The World Health Organization (WHO) sought additional information from Bharat Biotech for Emergency Use Listing (EUL) of Covaxin. Acquiring EUL from WHO is a pre-requisite for global supply of vaccines through the COVAX Facility.

A discussion of senior officials from Ministry of External Affairs (MEA); officers from Department of Biotechnology; representatives from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) was held on 27.05.2021, to discuss the financing options available for JICA under the Quad framework.

A discussion of senior officials from Ministry of External Affairs (MEA); officers from Department of Biotechnology; representatives from Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) was held on 27.05.2021, to discuss the possible modalities for identification of vaccine manufacturers for support under the Quad framework so as to contribute to vaccine availability in the Asia-Pacific region.

Regarding up-gradation of labs at National Institute of Animal Biotechnology (NIAB), Hyderabad and National Centre for Cell Sciences (NCCS), Pune as Central Drug Labs:

- At NIAB, Hyderabad, the Interim facility was inspected by DDCI and modifications are being done as per the directives and regulatory requirements. The interim facility is expected to be completed by 30th June 2021. Initial testing capacity is about 25-30 lots / month.
- Construction of Sterility Testing Laboratory and Procurement of Equipment as part of the permanent GLP facility is underway at NCCS. The facility is expected to be operationalized by 15th June, 2021. Initial testing capacity is about 3 batches /week.

DBT-IBSD and Botanical Survey of India, MoEFCC have released Compendium of the Antiviral Medicinal Plants of North-East India.
MEETINGS, WEBINARS AND PRESS RELEASES

- Dr. Biswas, Scientist NII has given an online lecture for Hansraj College (DU) under Science Setu program, Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav, on 'Targeting the RNA dependent RNA Polymerase of SARS-Cov-2 for identifying anti-COVID-19 compounds' on 25th May 2021.

- IBSD jointly with Society for Ethnopharmacology (SFE), India and International Society for Ethnopharmacology (ISE), Switzerland had organized Session-33 of the International Webinar Series-Reimagine Ethnopharmacology.