

Pune biocluster to focus on R&D in human disease biology

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The department of biotechnology’s Pune biotech cluster, designed to facilitate academia-industry collaborations, was inaugurated at the National Centre for Cell Science (NCCS) campus at the SavitribaiPhule Pune University (SPPU) on Friday.(Ravindra Joshi/HT PHOTO)

The department of biotechnology’s Pune biotech cluster, designed to facilitate academia-industry collaborations, was inaugurated at the National Centre for Cell Science (NCCS) campus at the SavitribaiPhule Pune University (SPPU) on Friday.

“For the first time, here is a mission that will facilitate a conversation between universities and industries,” said RenuSwarup, secretary, department of biotechnology (DBT) while inaugurating the cluster. She said that the facility has been given a grant of ₹120 crore.

While this is the fourth biocluster after Faridabad, Kalyani (West Bengal) and Bengaluru, Swarup said the University Research Joint Industries Translational (URJIT) clusters document

will be released in a few weeks. The foundation stone laying ceremony for the Pune biocluster was held at the National Centre for Cell Science campus.

Even as the building is expected to be ready in two years, the Pune biocluster will be spearheaded by National Centre for Cell Science and the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune, and funded by the department of biotechnology.

Swarup said that department of biotechnology has played the role of enabling and facilitating the ecosystem with a strong foundation. The effort now is to encourage innovations and enterprises with private and public stakeholders.

She described the biocluster as a platform which will allow people to come together. She said while the National Centre for Cell Science and IISER were “the enabling points”, the ownership of the cluster lay with all the stakeholders in the Pune region. “We are looking at expanding the vision,” Swarup added.

She stressed upon the role of URJIT, which could bring small, large and startup companies together to work on various research.

“Our vision for this cluster is that it is not a centralised equipment facility; it is a platform which will facilitate conversations between these groups. It is a knowledge translational ecosystem that we are creating so that the gap between the research carried out by varsity and the vibrant industry is filled,” said Swarup.

She suggested that industries should be co-located within the universities.

“Pune biocluster thus has all the ingredients which are actually in a position to take the biocluster forward and is the first to expand to a new policy like URJIT and take it to tier 2 and 3 cities,” she said, adding that the biocluster could become a regional one in years to come.

Bioclusters: Multi-institutional R&D ecosystems

Bioclusters, by definition, are multi-institutional ventures attempting to build research and development ecosystems by combining available expertise and facilities to promote efficient usage and productivity. The participating institutions are chosen based on their expertise and competence to develop effective bioclusters.

This project aims to develop state-of-the-art technology platforms that will catalyse synergistic inter-institutional and academia-industry interactions to facilitate larger scientific pursuits, especially in research areas addressing human disease biology.

It was formulated to facilitate and integrate the high-quality research being carried out at various institutions in and around Pune, and also aspires to help synergize research and teaching activities, to support clinicians involved in biomedical research, and to lend a helping hand to biotechnology startups.

