

Press Release

Tunisia-India cooperation in Science and Technology to benefit Africa

Two important meetings in the area of science & technology were held in Tunis on 23 and 24 May between India and Tunisia. A workshop on biotechnology and health sciences was held between Institut Pasteur, Tunis and the International Centre for Genetic Engineering & Biotechnology (**ICGEB**), New Delhi, in Tunis on 23 May, 2013. The two delegations were headed by Prof. Hechmi Louzir and Prof. V.S. Chauhan respectively and discussions centred on technology transfer to Institut Pasteur on combating infectious diseases and achieving objectives of research and development in biotechnology for benefiting countries of the African continent.

India is providing technical assistance for strengthening institutions in Africa engaged in research and development in order to provide widespread benefit across countries of the African continent, under the India-Africa Science & Technology Initiative announced by Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh at the India-Africa Forum Summit held in New Delhi in 2008. The African Union Commission has selected the Institut Pasteur in Tunis along with two other scientific research institutions in Benin and Gabon to work with the top Indian scientific institutions in order to exchange technological know-how for capacity-building, and hence this meeting. At this meeting, it has been decided that Institut Pasteur will be twinned with several leading laboratories of India towards capacity building in vaccination research and production.

India is today one of the leading countries of the world in the sector of biotechnology; it is the only country with WHO-certified capability of producing live tissue cultures and materials for use inside the human body. The **ICGEB** is the premier biotech research centre of India in this sector and Prof. Chauhan is a renowned scientist who has made major contributions in the fields of malaria vaccine, drug research and in design and synthesis of peptides of biological importance, including in vaccine designs for HIV and novel antibiotics.

The 3rd session of the Tunisia-India Joint Working Group in Science & Technology was held on 24 May 2013 in Tunis after the Workshop. The Tunisian delegation was headed by Prof. Slim Choura, DG of International Cooperation, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the

Indian delegation was headed by Dr. Arabinda Mitra. This meeting was held as part of the long-standing cooperation between India and Tunisia in the field of Science & Technology - the Inter-Governmental Agreement in Science & Technology was signed in 1995 and the current Programme of Cooperation, under which the two sides are meeting, was signed in December 2011. The bilateral Programme of Cooperation has identified several areas for bilateral cooperation, including biotechnology, material sciences, Information Science, renewable energy and geospatial mapping.

The Joint Working Group meeting discussed and selected Tunisian and Indian researchers for availing of joint funding for joint research proposals in diverse fields which will be carried out in the two countries. Both sides appreciated the increasing Tunisian participation in the prestigious CV Raman Fellowship Programme of the Government of India launched in 2010 especially for African researchers to promote scientific cooperation between India and Africa; as also the cooperation between Institut Pasteur of Tunisia and the ICGEB of India in the field of vaccines and drug development. While launching the 3rd edition of the Joint Call for research proposals, the two sides agreed that top priority would be given to provide support to joint research in frontier areas between Tunisia and India through mobility of researchers.

Dr. Arabinda Mitra is a well-known geologist who has worked in Antarctica and has planned and launched several multi-disciplinary experiments there. He is currently Advisor and Head of International Bilateral Cooperation Division of the Department of Science & Technology, Government of India, and is incharge of India's international science, technology and innovation engagements with 42 countries.

The two teams called on HE Mr. Moncef ben Salem, Minister for Higher Education and Scientific Research and on HE Mr. Abdelletif al Mekki, Minister for Health and briefed them on the progress made in the two meetings.
