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NCL LOOKING FOR JOINT VENTURES TO TAKE TECHNOLOGIES TO MARKET; FOCUS ON UTILIZING BIOMASS FOR CHEMICALS

The laboratories under the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), including the National Chemical Laboratory (Pune) are examining the prospect of forming new ventures, which can partner with private companies to take technologies developed by the labs to the market.

NCL is currently in discussion with two companies for possible joint ventures and also with SBI Capital Markets to raise resources for the new outfit that is to be formed. Although Dr. S. Sivaram, Director, NCL, declined to provide more details on the collaborations that are in the works, it is learnt that the areas of life sciences and use of biomass for manufacture of platform chemicals could be two technology strengths that the laboratory could look to leverage. In an interaction with the media at the sidelines of the Platinum Jubilee Celebrations of the institute, Dr. Sivaram pointed out that the arrangement could bring out the best of industry and research institutes as NCL. "Public

laboratories have the greatest power of innovation, not industry. But industry is able to bring efficiencies to processes, and this is something that innovators are not very good at. The idea of the new ventures is to marry innovativeness with efficiency," he said.

CHANGING DEMANDS OF SOCIETY

Dr. Sivaram also pointed out that the demands of society on the chemical industry will change significantly in the next few decades, with consequences for all industry players. To envision some of these changes, NCL is currently preparing an internal document, which will attempt to forecast the nature, size

and shape of a chemical plant twenty years from now. The idea behind the initiative is to try and predict the kind of technologies that will be needed for such a futuristic plant and attempt to build a prototype. "Obviously, such a plant will not be economic to build today, as it could be as much as twenty times more expensive to build, but it will enable us to envision the demands of the future and the consequent demands on technology," he added. Such a prototype, he stressed, is unlikely to be built by private enterprises, which are more focussed on the short term, and will have to be done with public funding.

FINANCE MINISTRY NOT IN FAVOUR REMOVING DUTY ON NAPHTHA

The Finance Ministry has turned down a request from the petrochemical industry for higher protection for manufacture of bulk polymers using naphtha as feedstock. A suggestion for having a differential between the customs duty on naphtha and polymers was also rejected by the Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC) Chairman, Mr. S. Sridhar. "We have not removed the customs duty on naphtha because of revenue considerations. A hike in customs duty on polymers is also ruled out as it will lead to rise in prices of plastic products sold in the domestic market," Mr. Sridhar said. He pointed out that the pricing of polymers was on import parity and not on cost plus basis. Currently, there is no differential between the customs duty of naphtha and polymers, with both pegged at 5%.