

NCL unveils plan for global visibility

To have new laboratory complex and Venture Centre company

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Pune: The city's National Chemical Laboratory (NCL) has unveiled a major expansion initiative in its pursuit of "enhanced global visibility" and greater co-ordinated efforts with the industry

The premier lab, the research facility of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), will create a Rs 15 crore-plus new complex with 80,000 sq. ft. of built space to house laboratories of polymers and advanced materials.

It will also float an independent non-profit Venture Centre company, which will occupy 10,000 sq. ft. of fully built-up space on the existing 'NCL Innovation Park' facility

The Rs 5-crore Venture Centre will facilitate transformation of early stage discoveries into marketable products or processes, besides enabling business functions and R&D centres for corporate entities. This will also be the first attempt of its kind in the CSIR.

Beginning next year, NCL will have a placement centre that will play facilitator to domestic and foreign companies reaching the research laboratory in search of Ph.D. research fellows.

"We have 450 Ph.D. researchers on the NCL campus, who are proving the biggest attraction in the emerging scenario where talent in science and engineering technology will mat-



The NCL's expansion move is in tune with the emergence of the Pune-Mumbai corridor as a 'hub of innovation' in chemicals, fine chemicals, materials and biotech

ter more than anything else," S. Sivaram, director, NCL, told reporters here on Friday. He said that the NCL was in need of additional space as there had been no augmentation of new major facility for over two decades.

"The new lab complex, expected to be in place by January 2008, will be the biggest construction to be undertaken by NCL since its inception," said Sivaram. It will consist of a common front building, five lab wings comprising 20 modular laboratories and a 120-seat theatre-style auditorium, he added. A foundation stone for the new

lab is to be laid on August 22.

With 120 customers, including some of the biggest names in the world under NCL's belt, the expansion was partly aimed at ensuring global visibility and partly in tune with the rapid emergence of the Pune-Mumbai corridor as a 'hub of innovation' in chemicals, fine chemicals, materials and biotech. "These are the next big areas. Globally, research is taking a shift in this direction. Over half-a-dozen innovation centres by leading companies are in the pipeline for Pune," said Sivaram.

He described the Venture Cen-

tre as NCL's attempt to inculcate the spirit of entrepreneurship among scientists so that they do not stop at generating ideas but take the same to business environs. "This has happened so far largely in IT, but remains a nascent concept for bio or material sciences," said Sivaram.

The Centre will be formally launched by mid-December with "skeletal facilities". A complete facility would come up by mid-2007, he said. The initial space will be available for 10 start-ups for a period of two years and, depending upon their success, they would continue or make way for others, he said.

Seventy per cent of funds for the project will be extended by the Central government for the first five years on a 'declining viability gap funding' and by the sixth year, the Venture Centre will be required to have a revenue model to at least recover its cost of operation, Sivaram said. The remaining funds would be met through fees and royalties by the start-ups, which will have to extend part of their earnings from the third year of the project.

He said, the Venture Centre company would be registered in the next two months. "We are into the last stage of approval by the CSIR chief, following which registration and appointment of managing director and staff will be done," he said.