

SBI Foundation and CCMB set up Centre of Excellence for Genomics Guided Pandemic Prevention and 2 Satellite Centres

- SBI Foundation & CCMB will focus on COVID-19 genome sequencing to improve efficacy and efficiency of the public healthcare response to the coronavirus outbreak in India
- The SBI Foundation Centre of Excellence for Genomics Guided Pandemic Prevention will be established in partnership with support CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology
- SBI Foundation will also set up Satellite Genome Sequencing Centres in Andhra Pradesh & Meghalaya in collaboration with CSIR-CCMB
- This initiative will enable the Central and State governments to make informed decisions in combatting the COVID-19 outbreak

Hyderabad, 27th December 2021: India reported its first case of the COVID-19 infection on 27th January 2020. The COVID-19 infection resembled symptoms like a typical case of cold and flu then. However, as the cases count increased, death count increased especially among the elderly. The younger population infected with the coronavirus showed quicker recovery. However, in early April 2021, a deadlier and more fatal variant of the COVID-19 began spreading across the country and claimed lives of both the young and old. The new mutation of the B.1.617.2 strain or the Delta variant, as named by the World Health Organization (WHO), was recognised as the dominant variant behind the onset of the 2nd wave of COVID-19 in India which continues to infect and claim lives across the globe. The Delta variant mutated also further into Delta plus variant or AY.1.

Accordingly, in August 2021, SBI Foundation decided to support CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) with a grant of ₹ 9.94 Cr for genome sequencing since a constant need was felt to monitor the evolution of the coronavirus in India. Furthermore, it is important to understand whether the new strains of the COVID-19 have greater ability to spread and infect the population. As predicted, in November 2021, South Africa reported the spread of the variant named Omicron or B.1.1.529 strain as designated by WHO. So far, several countries including India have reported cases of the Omicron variant among travellers from South Africa. However, the rate of transmissibility, severity of the disease and effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccines on the Omicron variant is yet to be known.

Therefore, with SBI Foundation's support, CCMB is setting up the SBI Foundation Centre of Excellence for Genomics Guided Pandemic Prevention and is working with the state governments of Andhra Pradesh and Meghalaya to establish satellite genome sequencing centres in the respective states under the initiative. Their current focus is to sequence coronavirus genomes collected from the samples of infected persons in these states. Siddharth Medical College in Vijayawada and Pasteur Institute in Shillong, which have coronavirus testing centres, will now be a part of the SBI Foundation Centre of Excellence for Genomics Guided Pandemic Prevention. Their procedures to access patient samples are already established.

Over a period of 1 year, the SBI Foundation Centre of Excellence for Genomics Guided Pandemic Prevention will aim to deliver effective results with immediate and large-scale public health benefits by covering viral genome sequencing, zoonotic (animal) pathogen surveillance, air (pathogen) surveillance and sewage pathogen surveillance across 4-5 states. CCMB will help procure the necessary equipment for these new genome sequencing labs and train their personnel in genomic sequencing and analysis. The handholding will continue until the new labs become independent in running the labs by themselves.

Talking about the initiative, **Shri. Dinesh Khara, Chairman, State Bank Group** said, "SBI Foundation is proud to be associated with CSIR-CCMB in the setting up of the **SBI Foundation Centre of Excellence for Genomics Guided Pandemic Prevention** to strengthen India's genome sequencing capabilities and provide invaluable data for

understanding COVID-19, thereby enabling the country to make informed, data-driven decisions in facing the challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic. From past experience, we have learnt that time is of the essence when it comes to fighting this deadly virus that continues to ravage the world.”



In frame: Shri. Dinesh Khara, Chairman, SBI inaugurating the SBI Foundation Centre of Excellence for Genomics Guided Pandemic Prevention in the presence of Dr. Vinay Kumar Nandicoori, Director, CSIR-CCMB; Shri. Om Prakash Mishra, DMD (HR) & CDO, SBI; Shri. R. Vishwanathan, DMD (Internal Audit), SBI; Smt. Manjula Kalyanasundaram, Managing Director, SBI Foundation and the team of SBI Foundation in Hyderabad, Telangana on Monday, 27th December 2021

“This project has two benefits. One, and the more immediate one is that these and more similar centres will help get a more holistic picture of the coronavirus variants circulating in the country. Otherwise, we will be only talking of variants found in urban India. Two, this will establish a genome surveillance system in the country with infrastructure and trained human resources in place. Post COVID, it can be used for tracking diseases in not only humans but also plants, animals, and environment, in general. This is a necessary step in enabling One Health concept, and prevent future health crises,” said Dr. Vinay K. Nandicoori, Director, CCMB.

Shri. Sampath Kumar, Principal Secretary, State of Meghalaya mentioned that they hope to develop the SBIF Satellite Centre on Genomics Guided Pandemic Prevention, as a Centre of Excellence for Molecular Diagnostics. The lab would focus on rare disease diagnosis as well in coming times. He also added that the lab will also address tuberculosis (TB) prevalence with special focus on multidrug resistance, an effort in line with the Government of India's mission of eradication of TB by 2025. “Learnings from the current pandemic underscore the importance of genome sequencing and surveillance. We look forward to understanding the science of pathogens & diseases further with a long-term vision in handling future pandemics,” said Shri. Sampath Kumar.



About SBI Foundation

SBI Foundation is the CSR arm of State Bank of India which was launched in 2015 to carry out its CSR activities as well as those of its subsidiaries. As the CSR arm of the premier bank of India, SBI Foundation aims to be the leading institution promoting growth and equality responsive to the communities it serves, particularly the vulnerable and marginalised sections of the society. For more information, please reach out to Mr. Aman Bhaiya, Assistant Vice President & Program Head, SBI Foundation on aman@sbifoundation.co.in.

About the Centre for Cellular & Molecular Biology

The Centre for Cellular & Molecular Biology (CCMB) is a premier research organisation in the frontier areas of modern biology. The objectives of the Centre are to conduct high quality basic research and training in frontier areas of modern biology, and promote centralised national facilities for new and modern techniques in the inter-disciplinary areas of biology. CCMB has played a pivotal role in COVID-19 mitigation in India using its expertise in biology.