

BENGAL BECKONS

Summary of proceedings of the first ABF conclave

30 December 2022, NABARD Bhawan auditorium, Salt Lake, Kolkata

A summary of proceedings of the conclave:

1. Shri Ujjal Biswas, Hon'ble Minister in Charge Science Technology and Biotechnology Government of West Bengal commended ABF for its endeavour and invited ABF to partner the government in promoting biotechnology research and entrepreneurial initiatives in the state.
2. Dr. Subrata Gupta, Addl. Chief Secretary Government of West Bengal, and Smt. Usha Ramesh, Chief General Manager NABARD West Bengal released an approach paper to develop the West Bengal Food Processing Sector Policy 2023. This new policy, being drafted by ABF, aspires to make West Bengal a leading state in food processing sector over the next 5-7 years. Some aspects of the policy are unique and will change the paradigm by which investments in food processing sector will be attracted into Bengal.
3. The session on University Industry Linkages saw presentations in agri-tech and related technologies by Jadavpur University, MAKAUT, Kalyani Govt. Engg College, West Bengal University of Animal and Fishery Sciences, and Directorate of Cinchona and Other Medicinal Plants, Mungpoo, Darjeeling. The panel of technology evaluators included established entrepreneur alumni of IIT Kharagpur from India, Singapore and USA, and NABARD representative.
4. The dais was also embellished by prolific and illustrious speakers such as Shri Rajiva Sinha former Chief Secretary Govt. of West Bengal and Smt. Riva Ganguly Das, former Secretary (East) Ministry of External Affairs Govt. of India who shared their invaluable insights and support. Dr. Partha S Banerjee, Trustee ABF reported progress till date and set out the roadmap of ABF activities for the next year.
5. The National Panel discussion started with an incisive analysis by Shri Neelkanth Mishra, Managing Director Credit Suisse on the importance of States and State level reforms in the overall economic development of the

country. The other panelists, Shri Angshuman Bhattacharya, Founder SIBIA Analytics, Dr. Sanku Bose, Group CEO Techno India Group and Shri Rajarshi Banerjee, President Seafood Exporters Association of India (West Bengal region) shared their experience of building and scaling up their businesses in West Bengal.

6. The International Panel included eminent speakers such as Mr. Adrian Pratt, Director American Center at Kolkata Shri Ranjan Nandi Vice President at Richard Design Services Inc USA and Managing Director India operations, and Shri Bimal Patwari President Pinnacle Infosystems. It was moderated by Partha Sarathi Chatterjee, ABF core team member, digital transformation executive with Shell.
 - a. The international panelists highlighted the unique features of Bengal – its rich culture and heritage, its abundant resources to attract outsiders. Mr. Pratt talked about the rich experience of culture and arts, which he and his family really enjoyed.
 - b. Both Mr. Patwari and Mr. Nandi talked about a perception issue with Bengal, where the reality of doing business is better than the perception. All stressed the importance of finding the gaps and addressing the issues. Single window clearance, ability to digitally complete application rather than paperwork, and finally, a phone number/contact to address any issue with new investor were some of the key items raised.
 - c. ABF pledged to collect these issues and ensure Government addresses them. Ultimately, WB Government must ensure investor expectations are met and they are suitably attracted to invest in Bengal and have an efficient way to run their operations.
 - d. Mr. Chatterjee concluded the panel extolling attendees and the wider network to stay engaged, address any gaps and highlight Bengal as the investment destination.
7. ABF pledged to create a research endowment fund and formed a task team to prepare a roadmap to structure this fund and mobilize an initial round of funding over the next 6-8 months.