

IISc centre makes SMEs future-ready with R&D suppo

SMEs are developing products to reach out to end-customers directly and grow bigger

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Imagine a wardrobe that can dry clothes straight out of a washing machine. This could be a breakthrough innovation for millions of Indian houses, which do not have a balcony or get enough sunlight for drying clothes.

There are some of the innovations at TIME2, at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) here, which is preparing the ground for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) through its research and development (R&D) to take their next leap.

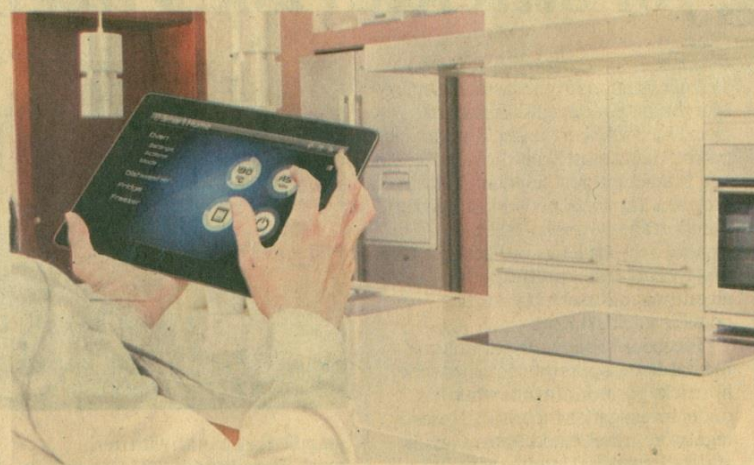
India is estimated to have at least 40 million registered and unregistered SMEs, employing 40 per cent of the workforce, if not more. However, they are not technology-ready to expand

their product lines.

"We are making SMEs technology-ready. They have product ideas but do not have the R&D capability to make those a commercial success. We are helping them develop a capability to come up with a technology and create a marketable product out of it," said Yatishwar Dravid, head of TIME2, a centre for SMEs at the Society of Innovation and Development at IISc.

For an SME to get into product development is risky. "Big companies can parallelly run research processes and develop new products and probe the market for success," he notes. If an SME's product becomes successful, it could go on to become a corporate but if this fails, it might have to wind up.

Hence, TIME2 does not disturb the current operations of the SME, irrespective of the development on the



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innovative side, said Dravid. Of the five SMEs in the first batch at TIME2, most are legacy enterprises, focused both on

business and consumers. Though some are seen as leaders in their fields, they are anonymous to the end-customer.

Now, they are developing their own products to reach out to end-customers directly and grow bigger in scale. For instance, a Mumbai-based furniture company that is in that first batch of SMEs innovating at IISc is exploring 'smart' furniture. Apart from developing a wardrobe which will dry clothes, it has also been helped to develop a shoe storage box which disinfects the footwear and also deodorises shoes and socks. A boon for diabetic patients, as minor foot alterations could mean disabling infections for them.

"The products will be launched in the market by the year-end. We have so far filed for six patents for such products," said Dravid.

Another 15-year-old SME, which is into scientific instrumentation, has developed a technology with TIME2 to grade cashew nuts. Cashew has 18 different steps of gradation -- not often

In the second batch of SMEs innovating at IISc, TIME2 expects to see a decision taken by