BioSpectrum the business of Bio & Health Sciences

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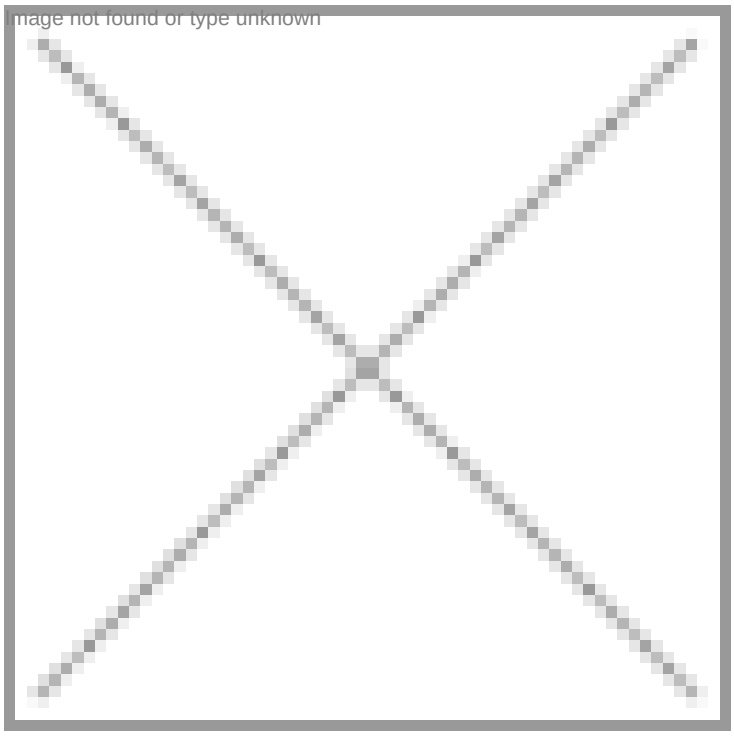

Nicholas Piramal expands its clinical facility at Wellquest

Wellquest, Nicholas Piramal's clinical research division, an early mover amongst the professional contract clinical research organizations (CROs) in the country added a new clinical section with a 52-bed ward, a 6-bed ICU and enhanced services for clinical trials and data management to undertake phase I-III studies to further consolidate its position in the rapidly growing clinical research services sector.

Dr William Haseltine of Human Genome Sciences Inc., USA, formally opened the facility that was fully compliant as per international requirements and GCP guidelines of ICH and the code of federal regulations of the US-FDA.

Dr Satish Bhatia, president, Wellquest said, "We are poised for rapid growth with such augmented infrastructure. We will continue to provide quality services in clinical research to the international pharmaceutical industry."

The bioanalytical section at Wellquest already has two LC/MS/MS machines and plans to increase the number to four. The core team of trained professionals managing the CRO is assisted by a number of scientific, medical and paramedical personnel totaling 65. The user-friendly design of the facility obviates the need for sending subjects or samples to remote sites for tests.

Established in 2000 by Nicholas Piramal India Limited as an independent division, Wellquest's state-of-the-art facilities occupy 20,000 sq ft of space over four floors of the Wellspring Hospital in Mumbai.

Pharmacogenomics center at Manipal with HP tie-up

The Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE) and Hewlett-Packard (HP) India are collaborating in setting a Centre of Excellence (COE) in Pharmacogenomics at the Manipal Campus. MAHE has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with HP India Sales Ltd for enhancing the campus experience of students and to support creation of the COE in pharmacogenomics. The centre of excellence is under creation by Kasturba Medical College, Life Sciences Centre, medical research wing of Manipal. It will research new pharma and biotech products, using the genomics platform. Genomic research requires analysis of large amount of clinical data, which is varied and in complex sets. Manipal has selected a HP platform. HP's contribution to the COE will include high performance servers, data storage devices, scientific software and professional consulting services. Speaking on the occasion Mr. DA Prasanna, member, board of management, Manipal said, "HP's technology will impact our courses in MIT making engineers more technology savvy.

CII to lead India's Biotech Mission to BIO in June

BioSpectrum special issue to show case India's biotech strengths at BIO

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CII delegation at BIO 2003 in Washington DC

It will be "India Shining" at the world's largest biotechnology gathering under the aegis of the US Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO) in San Franscisco in June.

Leading Indian industry organization, CII, will be organizing a big Indian Biotechnology Mission to the prestigious event. The mission will be in the US from June 3 and participate in a big way at the BIO event from June 6 to 9.

And BioSpectrum will be bringing out a Special Issue, in association with CII, to show case India's biotech strengths and attract the attention of the world to the Indian shores. For CII, this will be the third Biotech Mission to the US. And BioSpectrum, in the inaugural year of its launch itself has covered the happenings at BIO 2003 last June.

BIO has chosen CII as the official contact for participating from India. CII director, Dr Sandhya Tewari said the organization has formulated a multi-pronged approach to maximize the visibility for Indian participants.

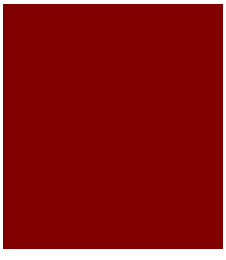
CII is coordinating an "India Pavilion" at the BIO Exhibition. The Pavilion will provide an opportunity for companies and organizations from India, including state governments to showcase the unique strengths India has in this arena. CII is coordinating a special session at the main BIO Conference, titled "Harnessing Human Resource Capabilities and Information Technology Prowess: Biotechnology in the Future". It will also be organizing a parallel conference that will focus on partnering opportunities between Indian and global companies and VCs.

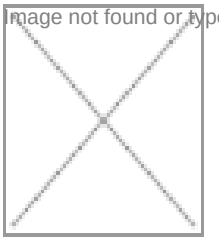
CII has coordinated with BIO to have the CII delegation be accorded the status of an "International Delegation at BIO". Also, the CII delegation's visit will consist of one-to-one meetings and company visits prior to the convention.

BIO 2004 will attract up to 20,000 top industry leaders, scientists, policy makers, academicians, and journalists from all areas of the life sciences industry. The new secretary of the Department of Biotechnology has kindly consented to lead this mission.In addition to this the delegation under the umbrella of CII, will host a reception for the external audience and dignitaries present at BIO. This proposes to be one of the highlights of CII's mission.

Devinder Sharma lectures British MPs on GM products

Devinder Sharma, noted writer, journalist and thinker on food and trade policy addressed British parliamentarians at the House of Commons on "GM Crops and the Developing World" on 23 March. His presentation analysed the implications of GM crops and genetic engineering for the developing countries. He also commented on the socio-economic causes of hunger and the impact that GM will





have on agriculture-based economies in the South. His views will help the UK policy makers to fully understand the needs of the developing world and the potential impact of genetic engineering on production, poverty and hunger. The UK has a leading role in international development and could use its influence to ensure that developing countries can enact effective legal measures to regulate GM imports and secure legal redress and compensation in the event of negative impacts, as required by the Biosafety Protocol. It could also lead a reorientation of the research agenda towards safe, sustainable agriculture.

Devinder Sharma

This parliamentary briefing was organized by the UK Food Group and the Gaia Foundation. During his UK visit Devinder also spoke at a debate on "GM crops are good for us!" at the Natural History Museum, London and at the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh.. Devinder Sharma is well known for his policy work on biotechnology, hunger, food security, sustainable agriculture, biodiversity and intellectual property rights, free trade, development and the environment. He is associated with numerous national and international organizations and civil society groups, and chairs the New Delhi-based Forum for Biotechnology and Food Security.

He writes a regular column in BioSpectrum.

IBAB organises dialogue on transfer of biotech knowledge

The Institute of Bioinformatics and Applied Biology (IBAB), Bangalore is organizing a public-private dialogue on "transfer of knowledge in biotechnology" with case studies from India and Europe. It will be held on April 19-20 at Satish Dhawan Auditorium in Indian Institute of Science. Leading biotech entrepreneurs and researchers from India and Europe will attend the meeting. More details are available at www.ibab.ac.in

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Lupin commences herbal business

The Mumbai based Lupin Ltd that conducts research in areas like New Chemical Entity, New Drug Delivery Systems and Phytomedicines unveiled its herbal business by launching nine products in a range of therapeutic areas including diabetes, pediatrics, GI, pain management and gynecology.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Kamal Sharma, managing director, Lupin Ltd said, "Lupin's herbal products are a fusion of heritage and science. We have used the time-honored principles of Ayurveda and married them to the advanced techniques of modern science to arrive at these products." He said that initially the products would be marketed through the ethical route.

"We will target the Over-the-Counter (OTC) segment and the export markets once we have consolidated our presence in the domestic ethical segment," he said. "World over we are witnessing a quest for discovery of new molecules especially from the herbal or phytochemistry route. India having a rich heritage in the area of herbals and is well placed to participate in this quest."

The herbal market in India and abroad has gained importance in recent days and many leading pharma players are eyeing this lucrative opportunity. Lupin intends to uniquely position its herbal range by leveraging its state of the art R&D skills, ensuring higher standardization of ingredients and conducting proper clinical trials.

Briefing about the size of the herbal market, Ajey Kumar, vice president in charge of Lupin's herbal business said that the global market for herbal products is estimated to be around $60 billion while the Indian market is in the range of Rs 5,000 crore. Of this market, ethical products constitute approximately 50 percent of the market.

"Herbals today have a growing international acceptance due to the fact that they have minimal side effects and offer a holistic healing approach. The global herbal market is growing significantly ahead of the allopathic market, with Germany and France accounting for almost 40 per cent of the total herbal products sold globally," he said.

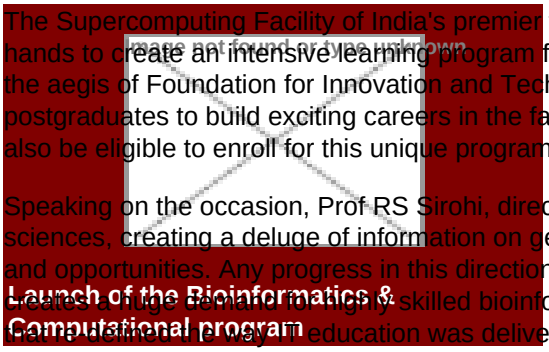
SIIL to launch combination vaccine in June

Serum Institute of India Ltd (SIIL), a Pune based vaccine manufacturer has delayed the launch of its a new combination vaccine by a couple of months. Dr S D Ravetkar, senior director, SIIL informed BioSpectrum that SIIL which is working on quadravalent vaccine (combination of Hepatitis B-DPT vaccine) will launch the product in May-June this year instead of April.

Briefing about the combination vaccine, he said, "The combination vaccine will reduce the number of injections, painful for children, by one. We are developing this indigenously as we have all the four components with us to develop the vaccine. Serum will be the only company after GlaxoSmithKline to launch such a combination vaccine in the world when it launches this vaccine. Even companies like Shantha Biotechnics and Panacea Biotec are also working on the same project. But these are dependent on components like DPT.

Serum is a pioneering company in the manufacturing of DPT vaccines in India. Serum is working on this vaccine for the last three years. SIIL a flagship company of the Poonawalla Group of Companies is supplying the vaccines at subsidized prices to the Indian customers and to over 137 countries across the world.

IIT Delhi and NIIT launch new bioinformatics program



The Supercomputing Facility of India's premier technology institution, IIT Delhi and IT education pioneer, NIIT have joined hands to create an intensive learning program for the bioinformatics field. The cutting-edge curriculum to be offered, under the aegis of Foundation for Innovation and Technology Transfer (FITT) at IIT Delhi, will equip a select number of science postgraduates to build exciting careers in the fast growing world of bioinformatics. Engineering and medicine graduates will also be eligible to enroll for this unique program.

Speaking on the occasion, Prof RS Sirohi, director, IIT, Delhi said, "The new millennium has ushered in rapid advances in bio-sciences, creating a deluge of information on genomics and proteomics with several scientific and technological challenges and opportunities. Any progress in this direction is of immediate relevance to society. The quest to meet these challenges creates a huge demand for highly skilled bioinformatics professionals. IIT Delhi is happy to partner with NIIT, the institution that has defined the way IT education was delivered, to create a revolution of perhaps a bigger magnitude."

International Data Corporation has estimated that IT spending in Biosciences will cross $138 million in India by 2005. The worldwide spend on use of IT in bioinformatics is also likely to spiral upwards with estimates of USD 20 billion by 2007.

Reasserting the complementary nature of the formal and non-formal education systems, NIIT Chairman Rajendra S Pawar said, "NIIT's association with IIT Delhi in the area of Bioinformatics is a reiteration of our commitment to prepare career aspirants for emerging technology professions."

Spread over six months, the Program in Bioinformatics and Computational Biology includes thorough training in fundamentals of modern biology, IT and hands on training in bioinformatics on the supercomputer. While the bioinformatics modules would be offered at IIT, the IT modules would be delivered at NIIT's centres of excellence in high-end training. The supercomputing facility of IIT Delhi has the best computing infrastructure in the bioinformatics learning space in the country.

Dr. A. K. Sengupta, managing director, FITT said, "NIIT's experience in providing software and learning solutions to a wide spectrum of domains enables it to create and deliver industry standard relevant skills. This partnership will help leverage NIIT's expertise in building an intellectual pool of trained professionals for bioinformatics."

The pace of current developments and projections present information oriented new biology as the next wave in scientific development, thereby indicating their increased dependence on informatics and extensive use of computational technologies. Given the IT and mathematical skills of Indian students, the expectations from the country are quite high.

Pharma R&D fund proposed

Pharma R&D fund proposed

The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) has proposed a focused fund of Pharma R&D. For promoting autonomous drug development processes in the country, ASSOCHAM has submitted a proposal to the government for the formulation of "Pharmaceutical Research and Development Support Fund".

In a note submitted to the government, ASSOCHAM president MK Sanghi suggested that there should not be any import duty

on capital goods and consumables used by the biotechnology industry and there should be a tax holiday for ten years. Besides, the incentive package should also be more attractive than that offered to the IT sector.

The fund would provide venture capital financing of high cost-low return R&D, ASSOCHAM said recommending that the management of this fund must be as an autonomous and knowledge-centered council.

Sanghi has also recommended the institutionalization of a biotechnology regulatory commission that is charged with the responsibility of resolving conflicting interests and integrating coordinated development in biotechnology and related businesses and ethical/moral issues.

There will be need for a regulatory framework that guarantees absolute privacy of an individual's genomic information, modification of the genetic code and various other issues relating to bio-safety studies.

In order to give the necessary support to biotechnology IPRs across the country, patent offices should be modernized, physical and intellectual infrastructure improved with at least 300 examiners, a large number of them specially trained in biotechnology and bio-informatics.

Besides, patent offices should be networked with research organizations throughout the country to keep track of research from early stages and identify potential and patentable areas, the proposal pointed out.

DU to offer undergraduate course in biotech

Delhi University (DU) will finally include biotechnology in its undergraduate program from the July 2004 academic session. However it has decided to open only 20 seats for this course.

"The course was cleared by the university's academic council during its last meeting," informed DU pro-vice-chancellor CR Babu. The subject is already being introduced as an engineering programme at the Netaji Subhash Institute of Technology (NSIT) in Dwarka. Admission to the course at NSIT and DU will be through the usual combined entrance test conducted by the university. The Delhi College of Engineering (DCE) may also offer the course, provided it gets clearance from the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), before the session begins.

Moreover, it is expected that if DCE gets the AICTE nod, a total of 40 seats (20 each at NSIT and DCE) will be available for the program. With the course being limited to engineering institutions and no general honours degree in biotechnology being offered by DU, things are not likely to be easy for students.

Also the admission to the course will not be restricted to those who have studied biotechnology in Class XII. Earlier, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) had introduced biotechnology as an elective subject in Classes XI and XII and the first batch of students will pass out in May. About 40 Delhi schools have opted for the course.

Bollgard farmers increase net profits by 78%

Cotton acres are expected to increase in the kharif season. Bollgard farmers appreciate the tangible benefits of technology with reduction in pesticide for bollworm by 60 percent and increase in net profits for farmers by 78 percent.

These are the findings of the study conducted by AC Nielsen ORG-MARG, a unit of Dutch publishing and information group VNU on use of Bt cotton at five states where farmers used bollgard seeds in the last kharif season.

Ranjit Panda, project coordinator, AC Nielsen ORG-MARG said that inspite of the tasting the fruits about 10 percent of the farmers are undecided to use bollgard in the coming season mainly due to price factor. The farmers prefer to wait and watch.

The study also revealed that the marginal farmers gained the most from bollgard against the medium and larger farmers. This is because of availability of labor in marginal farmers at their hands, said Ranjit Panda. Yousuf Ismael, research fellow, The University of Reading, UK noted that such findings were seen in other developing countries also.

Solanki, deputy managing director, Mahyco Monsanto Biotech India Pvt Ltd (MMB) expressed optimism about the ase in sale of Bt cotton in the coming kharif season over the pervious years. In the first year MMB sold about 72,000 packets while in the second year it sold 2.14 lakh packets of Bt cottonseeds.

The Mahyco Monsanto Biotech India Pvt Ltd (MMB), a joint venture between Monsanto and Mahyco, has commissioned AC Nielsen to study the benefits of Bollgard in the second year of its launching the Bt cotton in India. In the first year of its launch the MMB's product received a mixed response from the farmers due to various factors such as lack of proper monsoon, drought, etc.

After cricket, biotech do warm Indo-Pak relations

Pakistani government agencies have agreed to buy drugs and training material from Indian companies at an international biotechnology meeting, taking advantage of a recent thaw in relations between the two South Asian nuclear rivals.

The deals came at the end of the three-day conference, which was focused on how Asian nations can use genetic research to improve health care and boost their economies. About 250 delegates from 25 countries attended the meeting.

The conference also provided an opportunity for deal making, with 20 agreements signed, including three between private Indian companies and two Pakistani government agencies and one Pakistan-based firm.

Pakistani delegates agreed to buy anti-snake venom, anti-rabies vaccines and training material. Syed Uzairul Ghani, who heads Pakistan-based Amason Vaccine company said Pakistani and Indian firms were also discussing the transfer of technology that would enable Pakistan to manufacture hepatitis B vaccines.

New Delhi and Islamabad have taken recent steps to improve ties and address issues that have plagued their relations over the past five decades.

Rai University to commence course on nanotechnology

Rai University, a privately funded university with 25 campuses spread across India, will start a new course on Nanotechnology at its Mumbai campus from next academic year. The dean of the Bioengineering and Research Center of Rai University, Mumbai campus Dr VS Pingale, made this announcement at the concluding session of the two day national seminar on "Biotechnology and Bioinformatics: Challenges and Prospects" held at the campus.

Inaugurating the seminar, Tarun Saxena, senior manager marketing, Biocon India pointed out the ethical issues involved in biotechnology. However, Dr AD Sawant, joint director, Higher Education, Mumbai stressed the need for regular interaction between academia and industry. Dr BN Ganguli, Agharkar chair professor, Agharkar Research Institute and Dr DA Bhiwgade, dean, Institute of Biotechnology and Bioinformatics released the souvenir. Dr Madhuri Sharon of Monad Nanotech Pvt Ltd, who briefed about the importance and scope for nanotechnology, said about 9-10 institutes are offering courses on nanotechnology in the world. In India Amity is the other institute, which is planning to offer courses on nanotechnology.

Experts from the industry and academia made presentations on different topics such as biopharmaceuticals, prospects and challenges before bioinformatics, plant biotechnology, etc. In addition, the faculty and students made 15 presentations while 25 students participated in the poster presentation.

More than 250 student delegates from different colleges of Goa, Satara, Nasik, Akola, Mumbai, Jalgaon attended the seminar, which focused on the opportunities and challenges in bioinformatics and biotechnology.

Metropolis Health Services looking at CRO