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BioSpectrum honours Dr Cyrus Poonawalla with Life Time Achievement Award 2020

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Dr Cyrus Poonawalla, Chairperson of Serum Institute of India, was honoured with the BioSpectrum Life Time Achievement Award 2020 for his contribution to the Indian biosciences industry for over six decades, at a virtual ceremony held in March 2021. The ceremony witnessed the participation of over 200 industry leaders from across the country.

Dr Cyrus Poonawalla, a son of a horse breeder, founded the Serum Institute of India (SII) in 1966 in Pune when he was just 22 years and got married to Villoo. Over the years, his passion for offering affordable vaccines to the world had motivated him to build SII into one of the world's largest vaccine makers. SII now produces 1.5 billion doses of a range of vaccines annually, including for measles, polio and flu. With sales revenue of over Rs 5000 crore, Serum Institute of India is ranked as India's No. 1 biotechnology company, manufacturing highly specialised life-saving biologicals using cutting edge genetic and cell- based technologies, antisera and other medical specialties.

In his acceptance speech, Dr Cyrus Poonawalla said “I feel very gratified that BioSpectrum once again decided to give me an award after the 2004 award, which started encouraging me like any other entrepreneur, to reach real heights. After you get your first award you get very motivated. I think that is a very important message to younger entrepreneurs. And the journey becomes more challenging.”

Under the guidance and leadership of Dr Poonawalla, SII has emerged as one of the largest suppliers of high quality, yet affordable vaccines to over 170 countries. It is estimated that about 65 per cent of the children in the world receive at least one vaccine manufactured by Serum Institute of India. International agencies such as WHO, PATH, NIH, NVI/RIVM and CBER/USFDA work with SII to develop vaccines against Meningococcal A, H1N1 Influenza, Rotavirus and other diseases. Serum Institute of India continues to share its philosophy of care across many more shores by producing vaccines that would be administered to up to 75 per cent of new-borns of the world.

Besides Life Time Achievement Award, a panel of jury chaired by Dr Renu Swarup Secretary, Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Government of India, has selected other awards namely – Business Person of the Year, Entrepreneur of the Year and Product of the Year at a meeting held at her office in February 2020.

The jury panel includes Utkarsh Palnitkar, Founder & Managing Partner, Aarna Corporate Advisors, US; Dr Gagandeep Kang, the then Executive Director, Translational Health Science & Technology Institute (THSTI), New Delhi (she is now Professor of Microbiology, at the Wellcome Trust Research Laboratory, Division of Gastrointestinal Sciences at the Christian Medical College (CMC) in Vellore); Deepanwita Chattopadhyay, Chairperson and CEO, IKP Knowledge Park, Hyderabad; and Dr Bhagirath Choudhary, Board member of APEDA, Ministry of Commerce & Industry and Founder Director, South Asia Biotechnology Centre (SABC), New Delhi.

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Talking about the BioSpectrum Excellence Awards 2020, Ravi Boratkar, Managing Editor and Publisher, BioSpectrum India, MM Activ Sci-Tech Communications, New Delhi, said, “BioSpectrum awards as we know were constituted in 2003. Unfortunately, the awards ceremony was discontinued in between. However, we used to receive queries and calls. Finally, in 2019, we decided to keep up this good work and acknowledging, appreciating and awarding the exemplary work of individuals and companies in the respective fields with these awards. The actual BioSpectrum Awards Ceremony was organised at The LaLiT Ashok Bangalore, on March 27, 2020. But due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were forced to cancel the ceremony. We hoped to do it at a later date. However now we realised that it will be a time for next year’s award. So we decided to go virtually. Hence we thought let’s come together and do this programme virtually.”