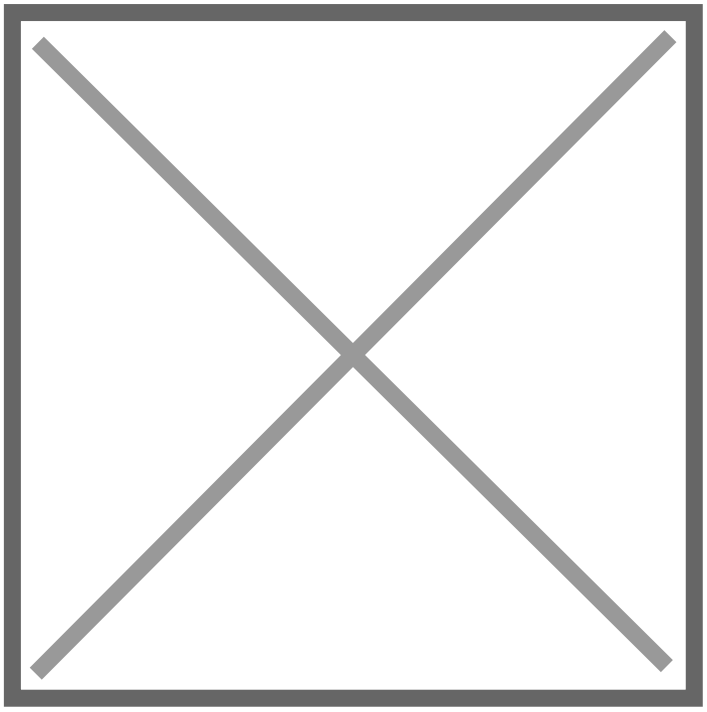
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Ã¢â?¬Å?Enforcement of IPR is a key challenge before the Indian biotech industry,Ã¢â?¬?

17 March 2004 | News



William Pedder, Chief Executive, Inward Investment Group, UK Trade & Investment

In September 2003, the UK Trade & Investment, a government agency of United Kingdom has established a team to identify and work with various stakeholders and partners to promote the international business activities of the companies, universities and research institutions in the biotech/pharma sector. The team has developed a network in India and was able to bring in some kind of coordinated approach to promote international business activities and concentrate on activities where it adds value to the activities of UK business. BioSpectrum spoke to William Pedder, Chief Executive, Inward Investment, UK Trade & Investment, who was in India to take part in the Nasscom event about the activities of UK Trade & Investment in promoting the biotech activities in India. Excerpts:

What is the model UK Trade & Investment has adopted to establish a platform for the benefit of the biotech/pharma companies of both the countries?
We are part of the UK government. Our motive and objectives are to assure that there are no barriers in doing business across the UK. Substantial and experienced firms do not need our support for doing business. But when it comes to acquisition, they may need legal support. In such cases we do not displease them. For SMEs, we provide free information on tax benefits, legal, regulatory issues, etc. We are ready to serve them for any help, but if they do it on their own, we do welcome them.

We try to create a proper atmosphere for capital investments in the UK. We do offer ample and sufficient information on rules and regulations in starting a business in the UK and try to remove barriers coming in the way of making investments. We have a regulatory body, which is very transparent and helps in establishing rapport between the government and working group.

What are your programs to promote biotech/pharma initiatives in India?
We do a lot of programs. First of all, we raise awareness about our initiatives and second, we do provide information through our website www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk. We do help people through introduction to the professionals. We do it in two ways through advisory services and through partnerships i.e., for technology transfers (partnering services).

We have a small program called global partnership. It is quite a popular facility. We are using that program in several countries. It helps in establishing joint ventures for development of technologies, technology sharing, etc.

As the first step, we work with events and activities such as trade fairs, seminars and missions. It helps us in developing a network of contacts within the government departments, trade associations, regional clusters, research and academic institutions and key firms. As we develop this network further, we will develop an understanding of regional issues, working closely with various regional organizations and developed administrations. We will also work in parallel with the UK industry and other government agencies to develop and implement a strategy that delivers corporate targets effectively.

Which are your focused areas as far as Indian biotech industry is concerned?
India is a developing player in the biotechnology sector. We see growth in biotechnology and pharma sectors in India. Centralized drug purchasing, generic drug manufacturing, international collaborations skills and cross border collaborations are our focused areas. India has good intellectual skills. Matching the talents of India with the UK skills is another area we are looking at. However, the challenge before the Indian biotech/pharma segment is enforcement of the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). The UK companies are bit worried about IPR in India. Hence the UK companies are looking at the US firms for tie-ups first, rather than Indian companies.

In India, you initiated your biotech activities from Bangalore. What made you to look at Bangalore first to start your operations?
We felt Bangalore was the most ideal location to start our operations within our limited resources. It is an IT -BT hub and most of the companies in both these sectors are located there. Our next destination is Mumbai, a base for the Indian pharma industry. We move with the market and grow with the industry.

What are the achievements of the UK Trade & Investment in India after the establishment of a biotechnology and pharmaceutical team in September 2003?
We have been in India for some time now. We have some Indian IT companies investing in the UK. Like IT, the level of interest among the Indian pharma and biotech companies too is deepening. Wockhardt did an acquisition in the UK. Our visit to pharma companies has doubled in the last couple of years. The companies that are into formulation, developing and manufacturing and looking at getting approvals for their oncology drugs in the UK are increasing. The companies are finding profitable business in customization and packaging of drugs. Fast moving companies do find opportunities in setting shop in the UK. And Indian companies are fast moving. Arvind Pharma has started its operations in the UK. We are very conscious that people may start with small operations but they will grow. We don't regret that people start off with a small operation. If the market is there, you will put more which is just what we have seen happening in the IT sector. Companies like Avesthagen and Sudershan Group have small operations to start with.

What is the current scenario of the biotech industry in the UK?
The UK biotech industry is significant and the largest in Europe. Over 60 percent of the European BT companies are based in the UK. We see over 500 BT companies. While the biotech is still taking shape in Europe, the industry has already reached the second stage of investment in the UK after a significant start. The industry has developed mainly due to the mixed form of capitalization. They have raised funds from VCs in Europe, the US and from angel investors.

Your views on EU ban on imports of BT products...
European Union has imposed a ban on import of GM products. However, we in the UK feel that the customers should be given a choice. We are part of the EU (a group of 15 nations). We have to go with the rules of the EU. GM food has become a political issue in our country. The GM food-producing firms from the US put pressure on the government of UK. But the government handled it in a balanced manner. We always wish that the people should get the benefits of the technology.

Ã¢â?¬â?•Narayan Kulkarni