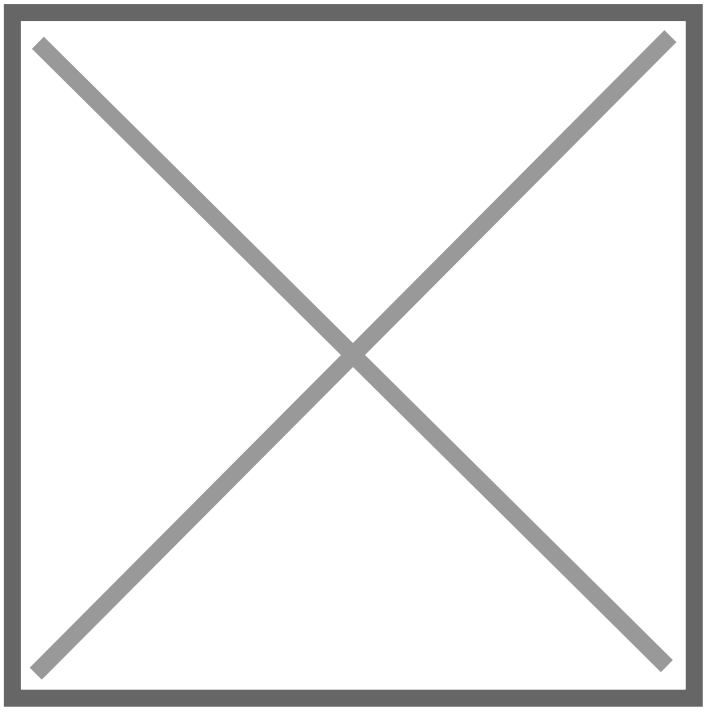
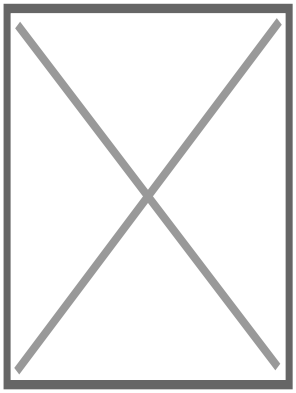
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Women power Indian biotech

04 November 2010 | News





For nearly a decade, there have been many murmurs within thefledgling biotechnology industry about the continuous spotlight onKiran Mazumdar-Shaw's Biocon. The only other company whichhas garnered as much media attention as Biocon is another equally admired and envied Infosys Technologies, also located in Bangalore's Electronics City. There has been grudging admiration for Biocon's dogged pursuit of its goals to emerge as a global biotechnology leader in a few decades. But behind the scenes, established players in the have whispered in hushed voices about the "biotechnology" quotient of Biocon.

In October 2010, the national, regional and global headlines earned by Biocon for two highly strategicinitiatives will go a long way in silencing these closet critics why Mazumdar-Shaw's company is at the topof the biotech pyramid right now. First, the deal with the world's largest pharmaceutical company, Pfizer.The global pharma giant has signed a marketing agreement to sell Biocon's insulin products in most of theworld markets. This is a path breaking arrangement because the first ever recombinant insulin made by anIndian company will compete with best in the world from Novo Nordisk and Eli Lilly all over the world.

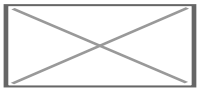
Pfizer did not have a product in the $14 billion and growing diabetes care market and after stringentevaluation selected Biocon's insulin range. Though launched n 2005, Biocon has not been able to breakthe stranglehold of more than four decades of Eli Lilly and Novo Nordisk even in the Indian market. NowPfizer's marketing muscle will provide better playing field for Biocon not just in India but in most globalmarkets. Both the companies will co-market insulin products in India, Germany and Malaysia and Pfizerwill do it alone in the rest of the world.

Biocon gets $200 million as upfront payment for the global marketing rights and regular royalty payments.Significantly, the upfront payment itself is equal to two-thirds of Biocon's last year's revenue. Biocon's pursuitof an identified target, to make headway in insulin, for over a decade has been amply rewarded. Moreimportantly, Pfizer's quality stamp on Biocon's manufacturing and product development with the highestglobal standards is an added bonus which will propel the company to a different league hereafter.

The second headline announcement from Biocon in the last week is even more significant. Biocon hasannounced a $161 million investment to set up manufacturing facilities in Malaysia. This is the largestever foreign investment in life sciences in Malaysia and also by an Indian biotech company outside thecountry. The Malaysian investment is again a win-win for both Biocon and the Asian country projectingitself as a regional hub. In fact, Malaysia hopes that Biocon stamp of its capabilities will make the globalbiopharmaceutical industry evaluate the nation's life sciences capabilities in a more positive way and moreinvestments will follow in due course. Half a dozen Indian companies have already headed to Malaysia("Indian biotechs line up for Malaysia", Page 20) in the last two years but Biocon's action puts it in adifferent league altogether due to the size and range of engagement in that country.

Together these two actions provide a clue to Biocon’s pursuit of global leadership in biotechnology.Very few Indian biotech companies have come closer to taking such audacious steps to enter the globalbiotech sweepstakes with a steely determination.Biotechnology is the only Indian industrial segment, after the entertainment sector, which boasts of alarge number of independent women leaders and entrepreneurs.

The banking sector has a large number of senior women managers but notentrepreneurs. Why life sciences has become a nurturing ground forwomen? A recent study by a sociologist at Bangalore’s Christ Universityfound that the biotech sector valued its women employees, who form morethan a third of the workforce at the scientific level, very highly and wentout of the way to provide all the facilities to them. A special report, “10Women Achievers in Life Sciences Industry”, in this issue is an attemptto highlight the efforts of some of these achievers.



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