

Women power Indian biotech

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For nearly a decade, there have been many murmurs within the fledgling biotechnology industry about the continuous spotlight on Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw's Biocon. The only other company which has 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 of Biocon's quotient of Biocon.

In October 2010, the national, regional and global headlines earned by Biocon for two highly strategic initiatives will go a long way in silencing these closet critics why Mazumdar-Shaw's company is at the top of 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 the world markets. This is a path breaking arrangement

because the first ever recombinant insulin made by an Indian 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 stringent evaluation selected Biocon's insulin range. Though launched in 2005, Biocon has not been able to break the stranglehold of more than four decades of Eli Lilly and Novo Nordisk even in the Indian market. Now Pfizer's marketing muscle will provide a better playing field for Biocon not just in India but in most global markets. Both the companies will co-market insulin products in India, Germany and Malaysia and Pfizer will 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 pursuit of an identified target, to make headway in insulin, for over a decade has been amply rewarded. More importantly, Pfizer's quality stamp on Biocon's manufacturing and product development with the highest global 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 has announced a \$161 million investment to set up manufacturing facilities in Malaysia. This is the largest ever foreign investment in life sciences in Malaysia and also by an Indian biotech company outside the country. The Malaysian investment is again a win-win for both Biocon and the Asian country projecting itself as a regional hub. In fact, Malaysia hopes that Biocon stamp of its capabilities will make the global biopharmaceutical industry evaluate the nation's life sciences capabilities in a more positive way and more investments will follow in due course. Half a dozen Indian companies have already headed to Malaysia ("Indian biotech line up for Malaysia", Page 20) in the last two years but Biocon's action puts it in a different 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 global biotech sweepstakes with a steely determination. Biotechnology is the only Indian industrial segment, after the entertainment sector, which boasts of a large number of independent women leaders and entrepreneurs.

The banking sector has a large number of senior women managers but not entrepreneurs. Why life sciences has become a nurturing ground for women? A recent study by a sociologist at Bangalore's Christ University found that the biotech sector valued its women employees, who form more than a third of the workforce at the scientific level, very highly and went out of the way to provide all the facilities to them. A special report, "10 Women Achievers in Life Sciences Industry", in this issue is an attempt to highlight the efforts of some of these achievers.



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