

India gets three new biotech products in August

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Amidst the negative news surrounding the entire country, there were some positive developments announced this August by the bioscience industry that need to be celebrated, and India can take pride in what has been achieved.

First, in the area of vaccines, the country's largest vaccine producer and number one biotech player, Serum Institute of India announced a path breaking research output in collaboration with the University of Pune. It received an US patent for the use of Ashwagandha as a vaccine adjuvant. This is probably the first instance of a patent being granted for use of an ayurvedic herb as vaccine adjuvant. Ashwagandha, which is known as Indian Ginseng, is used popularly as an immunity enhancer here.

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) had sponsored this joint research project of Serum and Inter-disciplinary School of Health Sciences (ISHS), University of Pune. Congrats to the Serum's team consisting of Dr Suresh Jadhav, Dr Sunil Gairola, and Dr Yojana Shinde and ISHS scientists lead by Dr Bhushan Patwardhan, Dr Dada Patil, and Dr Sanjay Mishra. This Ashwagandha adjuvant was found to be much more effective than the traditional adjuvant in applications related to diphtheria, meningitis, and tetanus, and the US patent will hasten the process of applying this outcome to newer vaccines. It also holds good promise for applying it to HIV, malaria, and TB.

Another indigenous vaccine company Bharat Biotech announced the launch of Typhoid Vi Capsular Polysaccharide-Tetanus Toxoid conjugate vaccine, branded Typhar-TCV. The advantage of this conjugate vaccine is that it is effective in both infants who are over six months and adults. The second major announcements were in the area of cancer treatment. Two Indiamade drugs have crossed major milestones. The second largest biotech company, Biocon, launched a novel biological drug Alzumab (Itolizumab) at almost half the cost of the available products in India. This is the first anti-CD6 monoclonal antibody to be developed and commercialized in India. In another development, a new drug to treat prostate cancer jointly developed by India's leading CRO Jubilant Biosys and US-based Endo Pharmaceuticals got the approval from USFDA for further development. FDA has accepted their Investigational New Drug (IND) filing application, which is the first regulatory stage of acceptance of the potential of the new molecule and the clinical trials of the product will start later this year.

These announcements should not be construed that the industry found a path out of the crisis. These outcomes are not as a result of streak of innovation during a period of economic crisis. It is a sheer coincidence. But these developments will have a long-term impact and could possibly become game changers. The slide of rupee against the dollar and the weak economic situation in the country are worrying the industry, though it has not been directly impacted by the financial melt down in the country. However, there are many other issues concerning the industry that, if not addressed can take the industry to newer levels of distress.

In June *BioSpectrum* said industry is at an inflection point. There was slowdown in the growth of the industry in general, but the heartburn in particular was that bioagri and clinical trials business had come to a grinding halt. The BRAI Bill is still to be passed. The Parliament voted for food security and passed the Bill. The government is calling it the game changer. The Bill guarantees a lot of things. The important question is how will this be possible if food production, agriculture, and nutrition are not a priority?