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Rallis buys major stake in Metahelix

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Rallis India, a subsidiary of Tata Chemicals, has acquired a majority stake of 53.5 percent in Bangalore-based Metahelix Life sciences, a seed research company. Rallis will subscribe to an additional equity of 5.52 million to increase its stake in Metahelix to 59 percent on a fully-diluted basis with an option of acquiring up to 100 percent equity in Metahelix over a five-year period.

Metahelix has been in the forefront of developing superior products in major vegetable crops through improved genetics and breeding technologies for insect and disease protection. Started in 2001, Metahelix has offered a large number of differentiated hybrids in many important crops like rice, maize, millet, tomato, chili and okra. It is also the only Indian company which has completely developed its own Bt cotton technology, which has been approved for commercial cultivation.

Further, it has several biotech products in rice, maize and vegetables in its R&D pipeline. The wholly-owned subsidiary, Dhaanya Seeds, has successfully popularized the products among large number of farmers across the country through quality seeds, product differentiation, agronomy support and a nation-wide distribution network.

By leveraging the market reach of Rallis and the well-established distribution platform available through Tata Kisan Sansar (TKS), Metahelix hopes to be among the top agri technology companies in India in the next five years.

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Advinus ties-up for Epic technology

Advinus Therapeutics, the research-based pharma company promoted by the TATA Group in India, and Corning, the US-based material science company are collaborating to bring Corning Epic label-free detection technology to India.

The collaboration enables Advinus to leverage the Corning Epic technology to enhance its own drug discovery capabilities and to provide assay development and screening services to companies both in India and abroad.

The technology combines biochemical detection and cellular analysis on a single label-free platform to enable a better understanding of biological activity for a wide range of research applications.

Ocimum builds GLP-compliant lab

Ocimum Biosolutions, an integrated global genomics outsourcing partner is building a GLP compliant, genomic and diagnostic labs in Hyderabad. The construction will be completed using a part of the recently closed $8 million worth funding. This four acre campus is scheduled to be ready by March 2011.

With the funding, Ocimum will add new offerings in the clinical trial support services, biomarker discovery and biobanking this year as it intends to widen its solution offerings to encompass the entire drug discovery value chain by being a one-stop solution provider.

GSK to sell US penicillin facility

GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and Dr Reddy's Laboratories have signed an agreement relating to GSK's US oral penicillin facility and product portfolio. Under the agreement, GSK will transfer ownership of its penicillin manufacturing site in Bristol, US, and rights for the Augmentin and Amoxil brands in the US to Dr Reddy's. GSK will retain the existing rights for these brands outside the US.

This transaction is targeted to close within the first half of 2011. Further financial terms and conditions of the agreement have not been disclosed.

Jubilant creates life sciences entity

Jubilant Life Sciences, formerly known as Jubilant Organosys, an integrated pharma and life sciences company in India, has demerged its agri and performance polymers business into an independent company Jubilant Industries, which will be a part of Jubilant Bhartia Group.
In order to create a focused life sciences entity, Jubilant Life Sciences, offering life sciences products and services to the global life sciences industry has demerged this business. This demerger will enable focused growth across businesses for both the entities and will allow the companies to deliver value to its stakeholders.

Jubilant Life Sciences is the largest custom research and manufacturing services company in India.

GE Healthcare collaborates for Alzheimer's

Global healthcare major, GE Healthcare has announced a research agreement to collaborate with Janssen Pharmaceutica, Belgium to identify a biosignature related to Alzheimer's disease. This research effort will combine expertise in data integration, informatics, genomics and imaging. Its goal will be to find a biosignature that may enable the detection of Alzheimer's disease before the onset of clinical symptoms. The collaboration is part of a broad portfolio of diagnostic solutions that GE Healthcare is developing in the Alzheimer's field.

"The collaboration is part of the effort to understand Alzheimer's that helps physicians to make more informed decisions about patient care.

Phase III trials are underway for GE Healthcare's amyloid PET imaging compound Flutemetamol.

Agilent launches express configurations

Agilent Technologies, the US-based measurement company focusing on advancing electronics, communications, life sciences and chemical analysis, has introduced express configurations for the popular CXA/EXA signal analyzers and MXG signal generators.

Express configuration products provide fast, off-the-shelf delivery of the most popular test and measurement configurations. This service is said to ensure that test equipment is shipped as fast as possible to customers' research and development and manufacturing lines, ready for immediate use, saving time, effort and expense. Express configuration solutions are preconfigured, functionally identical versions of Agilent's custom-configurable products. Express configurations also offer

value pricing for the most commonly ordered features.

India, Sweden partnership on pharma, healthcare

India and Sweden have decided to strengthen their collaboration in healthcare. Maternal and child health, adolescent health, public health and alcohol policy, medical and pharma products, public health research and infectious disease control, and anti-microbial resistance are some of the areas of interest. The Indian Minister of Health, Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad held discussions with Ms Karin Johansson, state secretary, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and her delegation from Sweden in this regard.

India has been supporting Swedish initiatives in the areas of anti-microbial resistance and alcohol abuse in various international forums, including the World Health Organization (WHO). Mr Azad informed the Swedish Minister about the National Task Force on Anti-Microbial Resistance, which is set up by the Ministry of Health to help formulate policies to check the spread of anti-microbial resistance.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the two countries in February 2009. In the last one-and-a-half year, since the MoU came into existence, three joint working group meetings two in India and one in Geneva, have been held.

Indo-German research center in Gurgaon

Playing a proactive role in facilitating participation of industry in joint R&D projects, and assistance in mobilizing resources to carry out industrial R&D projects, India and Germany have jointly set up research center in Gurgaon, Haryana.

While inaugurating the Indo-German Science and Technology Center (IGSTC) in Gurgaon, Dr T Ramasami, secretary, Department of Science & Technology, Government of India, has informed that the contribution from the Indian government for this project was $2.89 million (Rs 13 crore). The German government has committed $2.64 million for the project. The IGSTC envisages participation of private industry in the joint research projects. It will be managed by a governing body (GB) comprising of up to five members from each side representing the ministries, academia and industry. The GB is co-chaired by nominees from both the countries and will alternately preside over the meeting of the GB.

India emerges as global research hub

India has emerged as an international hub of scientific research in the last decade due to the growth in number of globalR&D centers, increase in outsourced R&D, increase in R&D investment from both public and private sectors, availability of talent pool, and rise in research publications. However, the interrelationship of knowledge or R&D with other factors such as innovation, macroeconomic environment, infrastructure, health and primary education needs strengthening to convert knowledge into inclusive growth.

According to the UNESCO Science Report 2010, India's share in world publications is 3.7 percent in 2008. In terms of patents, there is relatively low share of patents filed in India in comparison to those of China. According to the World Intellectual Property Indicators-2009 Report, India filed 28,940 patents in 2006-07, as compared to 2,45,161 patents filed by China. The government has taken various steps for the promotion and growth of scientific research in the country. The government has also increased the 11th Five Year Plan fund allocation for scientific departments to $16 bn (~ 75,304 cr) from $5.5 bn (~ 25,301 cr) in 10th Five Year Plan.

India, Russia strengthen ties

The IV Russian-Indian Forum on Trade and Investments was held on December 20, 2010, with the aim of developing partnership in information and communication technology, pharmaceuticals and life sciences, energy and energy resources, chemical products and fertilizers. Over 400 delegates from Russia and India took part in the event. The forum was organized by the Ministry for Economic Development of the Russian Federation, with support from St. Petersburg International Economic Forum Foundation; Ministry of Trade and Industry of India, with support from the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

Many agreements and memoranda on cooperation in life sciences between Russian and Indian companies were signed during the forum, which include, memorandum of intent between Pharmasyntez JSC and Naprod Life Sciences on joint production of oncological medicines. The business dialogue will continue at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum on June 16-18, 2011.

TERI, Deakin to set up nanobiotech center

The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), India; and Deakin University of Australia have signed a memorandum of

understanding (MoU) to establish the TERI-Deakin Nano Biotechnology Research Center, a center of excellence to enhance nanobiotech sector in India.

In May, 2010, an MoU was signed by the Deakin University Vice Chancellor, Prof Sally Walker and TERI's Executive Director, Dr Leena Srivastava in the presence of India's Minister for Education, Mr Kapil Sibal and Deputy Prime Minister of Australia, Ms Julia Gillard, as part of Minister Sibal's diplomatic visit to Australia. This development is an outcome of TERI's core capability of knowledge creation and development of efficient, environment-friendly technologies; and Deakin's India Research Initiative.

UM opens education, research center

As an initiative to strengthen ties between India and the Netherlands, Maastricht University (UM), one of the leading international universities in The Netherlands, has inaugurated its Maastricht Education and Research Center in Bangalore, on December 6, 2010.

Dr Jo Ritzen, president of Maastricht University inaugurated the center. Prior to the inauguration, memorandums of understanding (MoUs) were signed with leading research institutes in India to enhance knowledge sharing between two countries in the areas of health, medicine and life sciences, business and economics, law, psychology and neuroscience, arts and social sciences, humanities, and sciences. The new center offers PhDs in areas that are more relevant to India and the research activities will be co-guided by the experts at the Maastricht University.

Delivering the inaugural address, Dr Ritzen said, "This research collaboration aims at providing the best platform for blending research dynamics of India with the accomplishments of Europe. This initiative will give full-fledged research strength to India; and thereby it enables research enhancement."

New Delhi to host Vaccine World Summit 2011

Vaccine leaders from developing and developed countries will gather at the Vaccine World Summit in New Delhi from March 1-3, 2011. The event will be hosted by IMAPAC, Singapore, in partnership with Developing Countries Vaccine Manufacturers Network (DCVMN).

Participants will discuss strategies to tackle global public health challenges including appropriate pandemic surveillance programs, low cost and fast vaccine manufacturing technologies, innovative adjuvants and delivery systems, vaccine research funding opportunities and the latest clinical results of new and next generation vaccines fighting life-threatening infectious diseases such as cholera, malaria, dengue, AIDS and rotavirus infection.Vaccine World Summit is slated to bring together a distinguished panel of speakers.

WHO endorses new rapid TB test

The World Health Organization (WHO) endorsed a new and novel rapid test for tuberculosis (TB). The test could revolutionize TB care and control, by providing an accurate diagnosis for many patients in about 100 minutes, compared to current tests that can take up to three months to have results.

WHO's endorsement of the rapid test, which is a fully-automated nucleic acid amplification test (NAAT) follows 18 months of rigorous assessment of its field effectiveness in the early diagnosis of TB, as well as multi-drug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) and TB complicated by HIV infection, which are more difficult to diagnose.

Evidence to-date indicates that implementation of this test could result in a three-fold increase in the diagnosis of patients with drug-resistant TB and a doubling in the number of HIV-associated TB cases diagnosed in areas with high rates of TB and HIV.

Many countries still rely principally on sputum smear microscopy, a diagnostic method that was developed over a century ago. But this new 'while you wait' test incorporates modern DNA technology that can be used outside of conventional laboratories. It also benefits from being fully-automated and therefore easy and safe to use.