

News Snippets June 2005

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Cherian Philip to head US ABLE chapter

The Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises (ABLE) is opening its US Chapter with Cherian Philip, chairman and managing director of Sartorius India Pvt Ltd, Bangalore as honorary director. This was decided at its executive council meeting held on April 25, 2005. Cherian Philip has held various positions in the group and has built Sartorius from a single person operation to an organization with over 300 employees currently.

ABLE's participation in the forthcoming BIO 2005 in Philadelphia from June 19-21, 2005 provides a timely launch for the US Chapter and will be an effective platform to promote the Indian biotech industry in the US.

Dr Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, president, ABLE said, "The launch of ABLE's US chapter is a significant milestone as India's biotechnology success needs to be showcased in the United States. India provides a tremendous opportunity for bio-partnering and several biotech companies in India have already forged alliances with companies in the United States. We are certain that under the leadership of Cherian Philip, the ABLE US chapter will be a tremendous success."

GSK launches 'Koi Hai' program

GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) Vaccines has launched 'Koi Hai', an education program on Hepatitis A. The program is aimed at creating awareness and educating the public on the disease. Koi Hai program entails social interventions at the workplace, in schools and in clinics that reach out to the various segments of audiences. A key project is the workplace intervention program that has been initiated in people intensive sectors for e.g. public sector units (PSUs), BPOs, IT companies and paramilitary forces. A large-scale mass media campaign would be prominent across the main centers in India with a film

issued in public interest. This film will be aired on various television channels.

Dr Sanjoy K Datta, medical director, GSK Vaccines, said, "Hepatitis A is a highly infectious disease that can be prevented. Our research has proven that awareness levels are quite low and that people are unaware of the types of hepatitis infections, its symptoms, sources of infection and prevention methods. This emphasizes the need for an educational campaign on hepatitis A that would equip people to protect themselves against the possible threat of the disease."

VH group to launch vaccines for cold, arthritis by 2007

Pune-based Venkateshwara Hatcheries (VH) group leading poultry vaccine manufacturer, is working on three major vaccines for ailments that afflict a majority of the common populace and expected to be released in 2007.

Common cold and cough, arthritis and pneumonia are some of the vaccines that will hit the market in the next 18-19 months.

"We are in the final stages of the development of the vaccines and had applied for an Indian patent. We have already obtained the US patent for these vaccines and are presently working on the mode of dispensing the vaccines oral or injections," said OP Singh, CEO, Venkateshwara Hatcheries Pvt Ltd.

The objective is to provide affordable healthcare products for the masses. Around 40 per cent of these vaccines are meant for the export market, informed Singh. He further informed that BV Biologicals - the new entity of the VH group set up at the Hinjewadi Biotech Park was nearing completion.

Singh said that the company is investing Rs 60 crore in the first two years and another Rs 120 crore in the following two years. The company entered into a tie-up with a US-based company for biondiagnostics and biogeneric products. The aim is to bring in certain new molecules for diseases such as cancer. The company is also investing in new vaccines and biotherapeutics for child and adult immunization. There are plans to enter the protein drug sector as well.

Panacea Biotec posts net Rs 7.36 crore in Q4

Panacea Biotec has posted a net profit of Rs 7.36 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 31, 2005, against Rs 0.44 crore in the same quarter the previous year. Operating profit has increased by 42 per cent to touch Rs 14.93 crore (Rs 10.52 crore).

Panacea Biotec has achieved record turnover of Rs 335.76 crore (Rs 272.15 crore) for the 2004-05 fiscal, a growth of 23 per cent, stated a company release. Operating profit during the period was Rs 72.13 crore (Rs 42.43 crore). The company recorded a net profit of Rs 30.06 crore (Rs 16.45 crore), up by 83 per cent.

Strides Arcolab to acquire 60 percent stake in Biopharma

Strides Arcolab Ltd, a Bangalore-based pharma company, announced that its Board of Directors approved the proposal for acquisition of up to 60 percent stake in Biopharma, a Venezuelan pharmaceutical and marketing company. The proposed acquisition would be at a cost not exceeding \$1.00 million and would be subject to due diligence. Post due diligence, the investment would be made by Strides through Strides Latina SA, Uruguay the investment vehicle of the company for its Latin American operations.

CCMB to have LACONES by July

A new Laboratory for the Conservation of Endangered Animal Species (LACONES) will be opened in July at the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad. The Laboratory will help in the preservation of endangered species including the tiger.

Announcing this, Kapil Sibal, minister for science and technology and ocean development said that preserving the tiger is actually persevering the human species. He said that two different methods would be adopted for preserving the genetic diversity of the tiger population in the country.

The first plan of action involves collection of the tigers' scat samples for DNA finger printing, which will give an accurate picture of the number of tigers in a forest area. If it is found that there is lack of genetic diversity, a second method involving stunning the tiger and collection of sperms through electro ejaculation will be adopted. The sperms having maximum virility will be frozen and will be used for genetic diversity through artificial insemination. In this process we do not need cloning, Sibal said. By July the process of collecting the scat samples will be started by training the Forest Department workers. It is a joint project by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and the Department of Biotechnology. By the end of the year, we shall have the complete picture of the tigers, said Sibal.

Nuziveedu launches Bt cotton strains

Nuziveedu Seeds Ltd, a seeds manufacturer, has launched Bt versions of its cotton hybrid varieties - Bunny and Mallika. The Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) had cleared Bunny Bt and Mallika for commercial release in May. Nuziveedu Seeds had entered into a pact with Mahyco-Monsanto for using Bt technology in the new varieties.

The GEAC had earlier rejected extension for three Bt cotton varieties of Mahyco-Monsanto in Andhra Pradesh. The GEAC approval for Nuziveedu Seeds is for the commercial release of Bt varieties in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

"We have prepared about five lakh packets (each containing 450 gm) of Bt hybrid seed for cultivation in the kharif season. Of these, 1.2-1.5 lakh packets will be sold in Andhra Pradesh. Each packet contains 120 gm of hybrid seed," said M Prabhakar

Rao, managing director, Nuziveedu Seeds Ltd.

Mahyco's Bt versions get GEAC nod

The Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) has given its approval to Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Company (Mahyco) to market its three varieties of Bt cotton hybrids - MECH-12Bt, MECH-162Bt and MECH 184Bt - containing Cry 1 Ac Gene for the central zone (consisting of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra) for another two years. However, it decided to not to renew the permission for Mahyco to market Bt cottonseeds in Andhra Pradesh.

For the other southern states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, the GEAC has approved two of the Bt cotton hybrids (MECH-162Bt and MECH 184Bt). However, it has barred commercialization of MECH 12 Bt for Tamil Nadu and Karnataka as well.

The GEAC had allowed commercialization of Bt cotton hybrids in the central and south zones for three seasons beginning 2002. For the last two months, GEAC had deferred its decision on renewal of Bt cotton following protests by civil society groups including Greenpeace and Gene Campaign. It had, however, permitted commercial marketing of the Bt cottonseeds in the north zone. The GEAC has also permitted commercialization of Rasi's two hybrids of Bt cotton for certain states. They include RCH 144 Bt for central zone that include Maharashtra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh and RCH 20 Bt for southern zone that include Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.