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"Initiatives such as Make in India and PLI Scheme have significantly strengthened India's position as an attractive destination for investment"

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As biologics, cell and gene therapies, and precision medicine reshape the global healthcare landscape, Asia-Pacific is emerging as a strategic hub for biopharmaceutical manufacturing and innovation. In line with this transformation, Merck Life Science has expanded its Peenya facility in Bengaluru, strengthening its manufacturing footprint and supply chain capabilities across the region. The site now serves as a key hub for advanced filtration technologies, process innovation, and customer collaboration through initiatives such as M Lab. In an exclusive conversation with BioSpectrum India, Tony Qiu, Head of APAC Region, Global Plant Operations, ISCO, Merck Life Science, discusses the facility's growing role in supporting global bioprocessing needs, fostering innovation, and advancing India's position in the global life sciences ecosystem.



What strategic factors drove the decision to expand the Peenya facility with new filtration hardware lines?

The Peenya facility has established a clear roadmap for expanding its manufacturing capabilities, built on a proven track record in engineering and producing filtration devices and consumables within controlled environments — including clean rooms that adhere to stringent cGMP guidelines.

In 2026, the site marks a significant milestone with the serial production of MVP Icon swabs, signalling Peenya's entry into next-generation product manufacturing. MVP Icon is a rapid, ATP-based test designed for hygiene monitoring in the Food & Beverage industry — a product that reflects both technical sophistication and strong market relevance. This launch reinforces Peenya's position as a high-capability production node within the APAC network.

Yet the site's evolution extends beyond the production roadmap. Peenya is increasingly engaged in the commercialisation of new products, representing a defining shift in the site's strategic role — from a manufacturing execution facility to one that is embedded earlier in the product lifecycle. The site is bridging the gap between innovation and commercial-scale production, becoming an active partner in bringing new solutions to market.

How will this expansion improve global supply reliability and access to critical filtration solutions for customers?

As global demand for biologics, vaccines, and advanced therapies continues to rise, ensuring reliable access to critical bioprocessing components has become essential for uninterrupted drug manufacturing. In this context, the expansion of our Peenya facility in Bengaluru strengthens global supply reliability by adding new production lines for filtration hardware systems and advanced solutions, technologies that play a vital role in the purification of life-saving medicines and vaccines.

By expanding manufacturing capacity in India, we are reducing reliance on single-region production, improving supply continuity, and enabling faster, more responsive delivery to customers across APAC and global markets. The expansion also helps shorten lead times, mitigate supply chain disruptions, and provide greater flexibility during periods of demand surges, such as large-scale vaccine production.

At the same time, the expanded footprint improves inventory availability and proximity to key markets, ensuring that customers have timely access to high-quality filtration solutions, ultimately supporting more reliable and uninterrupted drug manufacturing worldwide.

What new capabilities or competitive advantages will the Peenya site gain from this expansion compared to other global facilities?

The expansion of the Peenya facility in Bengaluru significantly strengthens Merck's ability to ensure a consistent and reliable supply of critical filtration solutions to global markets. With the addition of new production lines for both filtration hardware systems and high-value consumables, the site is playing an increasingly central role in supporting uninterrupted bioprocessing operations.

This dual capability positions Peenya as a more comprehensive bioprocessing solutions hub, enabling greater flexibility, scalability, and responsiveness to evolving customer needs. At the same time, its location in India provides access to a strong engineering talent pool and a well-developed supplier ecosystem, allowing the facility to combine cost efficiency with our global quality standards.

Compared with other global facilities, Peenya's strength lies in this combination of expanded product scope, end-to-end manufacturing capability, and regional proximity. Together, these advantages position the site as a highly competitive and globally relevant hub that supports both APAC growth and broader supply chain resilience.

To what extent have initiatives like Make in India and Production Linked Incentive Scheme influenced Merck's investment decisions in India?

Initiatives such as Make in India and the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme have significantly strengthened India's position as an attractive destination for investment. These programmes reflect the country's commitment to building robust domestic manufacturing capabilities, strengthening supply chains, and creating a supportive policy environment for sectors such as life sciences and biopharma.

From our perspective, such policy initiatives enhance the overall business environment by encouraging local manufacturing, supporting infrastructure development, and ensuring greater policy consistency. They also contribute to building a reliable and sustainable supply ecosystem while enabling access to a skilled and capable workforce.

Taken together, initiatives like Make in India and the PLI scheme serve as important enablers that align with our long-term vision of building resilient, future-ready capabilities in India while supporting the country's growing role in the global life sciences value chain.

What key policy or regulatory changes are still needed for India to emerge as a global leader in biologics and advanced therapies manufacturing?

India's pharmaceutical industry is evolving beyond its traditional focus on generics toward higher-value areas such as complex biologics, biosimilars, and emerging cell and gene therapies. In response, leading biopharma companies are increasing R&D investments, strengthening advanced manufacturing capabilities, and building strategic partnerships with global players to expand expertise in innovation-driven therapies.

While the sector has played a major role in improving global access to affordable medicines and supporting supply chains, several structural challenges remain. These include the high cost of drug development, complexities around patents and intellectual property rights, and regulatory frameworks that are still evolving for advanced therapies.

In addition, gaps such as limited fast-track approval pathways, pricing regulations that may constrain R&D incentives, and the absence of widely adopted value-based pricing models for biologics continue to pose challenges. Addressing these issues through stronger analytical, clinical, and manufacturing infrastructure will be key to enabling Indian biopharma companies to compete more effectively on the global stage.

What roles do platforms like M Lab play in enabling innovation, scale-up, and collaboration for customers across India and APAC?

Our M Lab Collaboration Centers, including major hubs in Bengaluru and Shanghai, play a key role in accelerating pharmaceutical innovation across India and the broader APAC region. These centres provide non-GMP simulated environments where customers can test processes, optimise workflows, and receive hands-on technical training, enabling faster scale-up while reducing technology transfer risks and development costs.

By bridging the gap between R&D and commercial manufacturing, the labs support process optimisation and provide specialised expertise in advanced areas such as cell and gene therapy manufacturing. In line with this focus, Merck recently partnered with Cyto-Facto to advance the development and manufacturing of cell and gene therapies in Japan, combining Merck's global technologies and expertise with Cyto-Facto's specialised capabilities to accelerate the delivery of safe, next-generation therapies to patients.

Also, our M Lab in Korea has recently implemented a Biosafety Level 2 (BSL-2) capability—meaning we can safely work with a broader range of biological materials. This enables facility, equipment and procedures to handle viral vectors and related production cell lines, as well as other moderate-risk samples—so customer can develop their bioprocesses in a controlled, real-world setting and M Lab can provide troubleshoot and scale-up support with the right safety and containment measures in place.

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