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Asia evolving as a leading player in global search for new medicines: Prof. Sir David Lane

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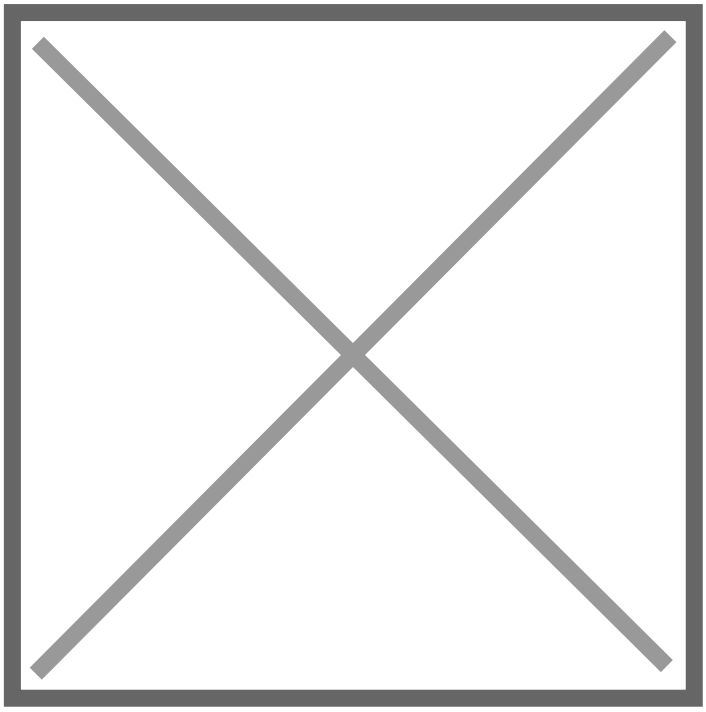


ASIA PACIFIC

Asia evolving as a leading player in global search for new medicines: Prof. Sir David Lane

Speaking at the BioMedical Asia 2004/BIOTECHNICA ASIA 2004 held at the Raffles City Convention Centre in Singapore this October, Prof. Sir David Lane, executive director, Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology, director, Cancer Research UK Transformational Research Group at the University of Dundee and founder and non-executive director, Cyclacel, said, "Asia is rapidly evolving as a leading player in the global search for new medicines. These efforts could reshape the drug discovery and bring novel life-saving treatments to light."

The event was organized during October 12-14, where the international biomedical community congregated. There were presentations from 23 world-renowned speakers over seven separate sessions. The networking and discussions that took place over the three days reaffirmed the potential of Asia as the next hot bed of exciting discoveries and new therapies.

Launch of BioSingapore helps to develop Singapore's bioscience community

BioSingapore, a trade association representing the interests of local biosciences enterprises, was launched at the three day Biomedical Asia 2004. BioSingapore aims to encourage and foster Singapore's bioscience industry, thereby boosting economic growth. The organization will complement initiatives by the Singapore government, which aims to develop the nation's biomedical sciences industry.

The launch of BioSingapore is seen as an important milestone in the development of Singapore's biomedical sciences cluster. It is believed that this initiative will help local biotechnology companies to engage key constituents, such as the financial community and provide an open channel for regular interaction. Further, BioSingapore will focus on supporting bioscience enterprises by stimulating investment, liaising with other organizations, facilitating local and international collaborations and educating the local community.

Highlights of BioMedical Asia include:

Ã¢â?¬Â¢ National Institutes of Health (NIH) of the US announced a grant of $1 million to ES Cell International, a Singapore stem cell company, to help build up its capabilities.

Ã¢â?¬Â¢ Sweden's Karolinska Institutet set up its first overseas office at the National University of Singapore paving the way for even more research collaborations between the two institutes.

Ã¢â?¬Â¢ The Bioimaging Consortium (BIC) and Chemical Synthesis Laboratory (CSL) will be set up. The BIC consortium will serve as a focal point for stimulating, funding, coordinating and reporting on the various bioimaging activities in Singapore. The CSL on the other hand will support world-class research capabilities and facilities in advanced synthetic chemistry.

Ã¢â?¬Â¢ Three new members joined Singapore's Biomedical Sciences International Advisory Council. They include Prof. Peter Gruss, president, Max Planck Society (Germany), Dr John Reed, CEO, Burnham Institute (USA) and Prof. Harriet Wallberg-Henriksson, president, Karolinska Institutet (Sweden).

Ã¢â?¬Â¢ Isis Pharmaceuticals Inc., the world's leader in RNA-based drug discovery and development, officially opened its research lab in Singapore.

Ã¢â?¬Â¢ The US-based NeuroVision, an eyesight treatment specialist, opened its third centre in Singapore in four months. Singapore is the only country where NeuroVision has opened any treatment centre.

"BioMedical Asia and BIOTECHNICA ASIA 2004 have again proven to be a valuable resource for the research community in Singapore and Asia. Delegates, visitors and exhibitors gave very positive feedback, with many reporting solid business leads, as well as potential scientific collaborations," said Dr Beh Swan Gin, director, Biomedical Sciences Group of the Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB). Dr Beh added, "We continue to support and co-host Asia's premier biomedical conference because we believe that facilitating the interaction between industry leaders from the US and Europe, with the

emerging Asian companies and researchers, will help Singapore and the region fulfill its potential to be an emerging center for the discovery of new medical breakthroughs and eventually therapies that will improve the lives of people around the world." BioMedical Asia-BIOTECHNICA ASIA 2004 was co-organized by the Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB) and the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR), together with Deutsche Messe AG and Hannover Fairs Asia Pte Ltd.

Source: www.biomed-singapore.com

Biotech industry maintains double-digit growth in Taiwan

The biotechnology industry in Taiwan is one of two industries on the island that has maintained a double-digit growth since the second half of 2000. While the production value of the medical equipment was estimated at $10.9 billion in 2003, the same in 2004 was at $13.79 billion, according to a report by the Industrial Economics and Knowledge Center (IEK) of Taiwan. These numbers represent a 21.7 percent growth in 2003 over 2002, and an additional production value growth of 26.46 percent in 2004 over 2003. This is because the government has targeted biotech as one of the key industries to drive the economy.

In 2002, the government of Taiwan released its "Two Trillion, Two Stars" plan and the "Challenge 2008 - National Development Plan," which were designed to help the largest industries and industries with the most potential foster. Dr Michael Su, recently appointed General-Director of the Industrial Technology Research Institute (ITRI), outlined the current state of Taiwan's biotechnology industry, and gave a glimpse of the future." Currently, Taiwan's biotechnology infrastructure is not quite as developed as the infrastructure in the US. This is due to the relative immaturity of the industry in Taiwan," said Dr Su. However, Dr Su quickly pointed out that developing an infrastructure that leads the world is a priority of the government."

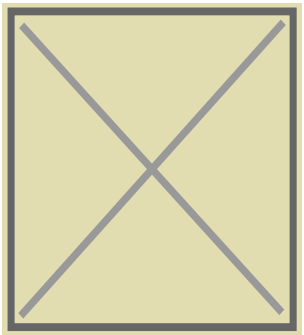
The government wants to improve the overall environment of the industry, while increasing incentives within biotechnology," said Dr Su. "ITRI participates in this role, fostering young companies and new technologies until they are able to survive on their own." Dr Su mentioned Phalanx Biotechnology Group Ltd, a spin-off company of ITRI, as an example of one of the success stories within the industry. "Phalanx was a flagship project of Dr Johnsee Lee, the president of ITRI. The company successfully integrated several different technologies, including electronics, communication, and microfabrication to produce DNA chips. Now, the spin-off firm has attracted investment of over $29.5 million." Looking to the future, Dr Su sees great potential for biotechnology in Taiwan. " I believe in the near future, Taiwan will lead in biotechnology, as it brings together its bleeding-edge expertise within the electronics industry and applies it in innovative ways to biotechnology, charting new areas within this relatively young industry."

One project that ITRI is considering at the moment is a large-scale genomic project, which would integrate microbiology, cell biology, and the local medical infrastructure to study genomic information. This project would be accomplished in concert with local companies, but would also provide international companies the opportunities to invest as well. This genomic information of an Asian population would offer new research focusing on local diseases and could be applied throughout the global melting pot.

Source: www.itri.org.tw

Cloning scientist to get support from Korean Government

Seoul National University professor Hwang Woo-suk would get morale-boosting financial support next year from the government of Korea in recognition of his medical breakthroughs. The Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) said it finalized its 2.3 trillion won budget for 2005. Out of this, the ministry earmarked 26.5 billion won to help Hwang's research, up from a mere 6.5 billion won this year.



Prof. Hwang Woo-suk

Hwang caught the world by storm twice over the past year, as he created mad cow disease-resistant calves last December and cloned a human embryo earlier this year. Up to 10 billion won will be channeled into building Hwang's research facility inside Seoul National University and 8.5 billion won will be spent to build other facilities and help the 51-year-old's research. The remaining 8 billion won will be provided for the gnotobiotic (sterilized) pigs project.

Together with the mad cow disease-resistant calves last December, Hwang developed six gnotobiotic miniature pigs, whose organs can be transplanted into humans. The pigs all failed to survive more than two days at that time but with the development of the technology, some pigs are currently older than six months according to an inside researcher. He added Hwang's team gained about five gnotobiotic pigs for this month alone and now holds "double-digit" pigs.

The budget is subject to the approval of the National Assembly but MOST predicted lawmakers would not reduce Hwang-related funds in consideration of the significance of his research. Together with the budget tailored to underpin Hwang's study, the ministry has set aside 10 billion won to nurture a research and development center in Taedok, Taejon. The ministry also plans to spend 1.5 billion won for the scheme of fostering the nation's first astronaut and another 3 billion won to begin a science TV channel. The total 2.3 trillion won budget marks around 30 percent hike compared to last year's 1.8 trillion won, in time with the science minister's promotion to the nation's third deputy prime minister.

Source: http://eng.kobioven.or.kr

AusBiotech strengthens international outreach through Indian MoU

AusBiotech and the Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises (ABLE), the two peak biotechnology industry bodies in Australia and India, respectively, have cemented their relationship through signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MoU will strengthen ties between the two countries and open further biotechnology partnering and collaborative opportunities.

"We are delighted to strengthen such an important relationship with one of the most rapidly developing and important markets for biotechnology in the future," said Dr Tony Coulepis, executive director, AusBiotech.

A recent visit by AusBiotech Corporate Member, John Grace, to India revealed a strong, growing biotechnology industry, providing Australian biotechnology companies with opportunities to develop partnerships. John Grace's visit was initiated and funded by the Australia-India council (AIC). The AIC is a bilateral council established and supported by the Australian Government to forge people-to-people and institutional linkages with the objective of strengthening Australia's growing ties with India.

"India is emerging as the new destination for building a globally competitive biotech industry. The MoU will assist Australian biotech companies access a new and growing market, which is anticipated to reach 50 percent in size of the US within the next 20 years," said Dr Coulepis.

Combining India's development and market potential across several biotechnology sectors with the Australian industry's capacity in new discoveries, should result in commercial benefit to companies in both Nations.

"India and Australia are joined by history, language and an equally strong interest in cricket. These associations are strong drivers in facilitating commercial interactions. We look forward to AusBiotech and ABLE working together to "unlock" the potential of the region," said Dr Coulepis.

ABLE was launched in April 2003 with an objective to accelerate the development and growth of the Indian biotechnology industry by facilitating strategic alliances between researchers, the government and the international biotechnology community. ABLE is also working hard to ensure it remains competitive by capturing IP and permitting Phase I clinical trials with international drug candidates.

Closer relations between the countries and industry bodies will kick off in November, at the AusBiotech 2004 National Conference, with an Indian business mission set to attend.

The relationship with India is part of AusBiotech's new three year Business Plan, titled, Globalising Australian Biotechnology, recently launched at the organization's Annual General Meeting. The three key elements of Globalising Australian Biotechnology are Sustainability & Growth, Outreach & Access and Representation & Support. AusBiotech's relationship with ABLE is representative of many that are already established and others that are in progress, with over 85 countries and organizations as part of the Outreach & Access element of AusBiotech's new Business Plan.

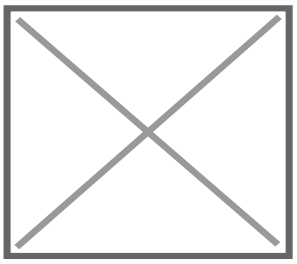
Source: www.ausbiotech.org

AMERICA

BIO, Banks launch investor forum

The Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO) held its first Emerging Company Investor Forum (BECIF) forum in October. It was created to address an unmet need identified by the investment community and industry executives for a conference exclusively focused on emerging public and late-stage private companies in the biotechnology industry.

"I don't know of any other occasion when multiple banks have come together to host a single biotech investor event," said BIO president Carl B Feldbaum. The BIO Emerging Company Investor Forum included: presentations from more than 250 biotechnology companies, therapeutic and technology workshops, business roundtables and topical plenary sessions featuring industry experts and thought leaders, an extensive one-on-one meeting program with management and investors, abundant formal and informal networking opportunities.



Carl B Feldbaum

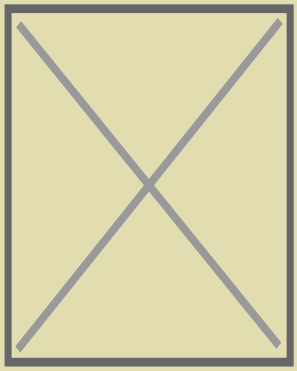
According to BioWorld Today, privately held biotech firms raised almost $4.2 billion, primarily from venture capital investments, in the first three quarters of 2004. Investment in these companies is up 47 percent over 2003 levels and has surged ahead of 2000's record of $3.9 billion. Publicly traded companies have raised $4.1 billion in public offerings alone, almost double the tally for 2003. Altogether, biotech firms have attracted $14.6 billion in financing so far in 2004.

The conference was hosted in association with Lazard and Banc of America Securities, CIBC World Markets, Pacific Growth Equities and Citigroup. More than 30 venture capital firms participated in the BECIF advisory board, which helped select biotech presenters ranging from firms seeking Series a funding to established firms with marketed products.

Source: www.bio.org

"We Believe in India's Capabilities, Strengths and Look Forward to Strong Partnerships,"

Clara Gaymard, president, Invest in France Agency (IFA)



With India emerging as one of the fastest growing economies in the world, France is aggressively trying to woo the Indian corporate. Clara Gaymard, Special Representative of France for International Investment and president of Invest in France Agency (IFA) visited India for the first time and met many industry people from IT, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, telecommunication etc. During her visit to Mumbai, BioSpectrum spoke to her about the biotech scenario in France. Excerpts ...

What is the status of biotechnology in France and why is it interested in India?
We have a great interest in India, as we know that India has bigger knowledge in biotechnology, pharmaceuticals and agriculture. As far as biotech is concerned, France is ranked #3 in the world. We have strong technological parks. There are four-five big pharmaceutical companies based out of France. We believe France and India can establish a strong partnership in this sector. We have very attractive measures for the foreign companies to come to France. People in France are confident about the biotech products, expect GMO crops and believe in biotechnology. They feel that biotechnology is a future.

What are the incentive schemes that you are offering to the biotech companies?
We have bio financing and many incentive schemes to the young and innovative companies doing R&D in France. We have both public and private sector financing to the young and innovative companies. The government offers many incentives to the start-ups in terms of tax benefits (corporate tax exemption, reduction on business tax, R&D tax credit), cash incentives (training grant, interest free loans for innovation (up 150 million euro for biotech start ups i.e., as loans and start ups), real estate grant, national cash grant etc). Life insurance is very important in biotechnology as it takes eight years to develop a biotech product. Hence the French government has asked the $800 billion French insurance sector to invest about $60 billion in SMEs and R&D centers focusing on biotechnology. Even the local authorities have funds for biotechnology space. In addition to public funding, we have private investors and seed funds, banks, VCs and business angels.

The inflow of FDI to France is 54.7 billion euros. What is percentage share of the FDI in the biotech sector?
It is difficult to say as this is an international figure published by World Bank. No sectoral details are there in the report. But what we know from our own statistics by taking into account the jobs created by R&D and biotechnology is that the flow of funds to this from France is about 2.4 percent while from other countries it is about 4 percent. There are lots of jobs created out of R&D and biotechnology with the high FDI in biotechnology.

What are your plans to promote joint ventures between the French and Indian biotech companies?
First, we want to tell the companies that it is not just the UK in Europe. I do understand English very well. Hence, we have to first convince them about the business environment in France and proper regulatory system etc. Then they will look at France. France has changed drastically in the recent past. We have many schemes and incentive packages, which are very supportive for the biotechnology companies especially the Indian companies. We believe in India's capabilities and its strengths and want to establish a strong partnership with the Indian companies. With this we want to learn to improve more and more and make benchmarks. We are confident that the reforms in India will be implemented from January 2005.

Many Indian pharma majors are entering the European regulated market by setting up an office in the UK or by acquiring companies in the UK and not in France. What are the reasons for this?
This is true. Yes we do have some kind of cultural barriers. But the main and key thing here is familiarity. The Indian companies are more familiar with the UK. We have to give them information and show the real picture about France. My visit to India is the first step in that direction. New initiatives do take time. After realizing the reality, others will follow the success path. There are 25 Indian companies doing very well in France and about 60 companies from neighboring China. Down the line, I foresee more Indian companies including those in biotechnology setting up their base in France.

EUROPE

New Biotech organization in Germany

Several listed and private German biotech companies have founded BIO Deutschland, a new bioindustry organization independent from other umbrella organizations. Horst Domdey, managing director of VC company Bio-M (Martinsired, Germany), is heading BIO Deutschland as interim president until a board is elected in December. Germany already has two other biotech industry organizations: The Association of German Biotech Companies (VBU), which is part of DECHEMA, Germany's largest non profit organization in chemical engineering and biotechnology, and the German Association of Biotechnology Industries (DIB), which is part of the Association of the German Chemical Industry (VCI). Prior to the founding of BIO Deutschland, the entire board of VBU stepped down and is now among the founders of BIO Deutschland.

Source: www.swissbiotechassociation.ch

GM opponents' theory on co-existence "exaggerated": new report

Five key principles are all it takes to ensure the successful co-existence of GM, organic and conventional crops. This is according to a new research paper released by PG Economics.

Co-existence is currently high on the agenda of opponents to GM technology who believe that GM crops cannot "co-exist" along side their organic and conventional equivalents and are calling on EU governments to set up liability rules to protect non-GM farmers from "contamination". The research paper "Co-existence of GM and non-GM crops: current experience and key principles" highlights fundamental flaws in many of their "exaggerated" arguments.

According to the report, on-farm experience in North America and Spain since 1995 has demonstrated that through the application of sensible farm level practices (e.g. the separation of crops by space and time, good communication with neighbours and the use of good husbandry practices) successful co-existence between GM and non GM crops has been possible, and without government involvement.

Speaking in Zaragossa, Spain, Graham Brookes, author of the report said, "Like all good farm management practices, the co-existence of different agricultural production systems requires mutual respect and shared responsibly by all parties including both GM and non GM growers. If you apply the five key principles outlined in the report and adapt these to local circumstances on a crop by crop basis, effective co-existence practices can be achieved."

The five key principles being:

Ã¢â?¬Â¢ Context: Determine the relative commercial and agronomic importance of different crop production systems based on planted area, production and economic value.

Ã¢â?¬Â¢ Consistency: Producers should be consistent in dealing with the adventitious presence of all unwanted material, including GM, organic and conventional.

Ã¢â?¬Â¢ Proportionality: All co-existence measures established should be proportionate, non discriminatory and science-based.

Ã¢â?¬Â¢ Equity (fairness): Any economic liability provisions (that compensate non GM growers for adventitious presence of GM) should be equally applicable to GM growers for adventitious presence of non-GM crops. No one sector should be able to veto another Ã¢â?¬â?? access and choice works both ways

Ã¢â?¬Â¢ Practicality: All co-existence measures should be based on legal, practical and scientific realities.

Ã¢â?¬Â¢ Co-existence is based on the premise that farmers should be free to cultivate the crops of their choice using the production system they prefer whether they are GM, conventional or organic. Despite claims from opponents, co-existence is not a crop safety issue but one that relates solely to the production and marketing of crops approved for use.

Source: www.europabio.org
