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Catchup Capsule: Key APAC Insights You Need To Read

by Ian Haydock

Given its ever-growing role as a critical component of the global biopharma industry, you can't afford not to be up to speed on Asia. This biweekly selection of insights from our experienced on-the-ground team will help.

A selection of key stories from the Asia-based content team for the *Pink Sheet* and *Scrip* over the past few weeks reflects both the diversity of region and broader developments in the global sector, particularly with the recent break-neck pace of coronavirus vaccine advances.

In this edition: a senior regional supply chain executive from Janssen talks to Mumbai-based Anju Ghangurde about the challenges earlier this year in China and looks ahead to vaccine plans; Brian Yang reports from Beijing on China's warm welcome for a huge new regional trade bloc; Vibha Ravi in Mumbai assesses a possible Indian deal for a COVID-19 vaccine frontrunner; Jung Won Shin takes a view from Seoul on the pandemic's toll on Korean R&D; and from Tokyo Ian Haydock looks at a major gene therapy alliance in Japan.

(Highlighted text provides the link to the original story.)

Janssen Talks Supply Chains

If supply chain and logistics teams in pharma were traditionally seen as behind-the-scenes operations types, then the coronavirus pandemic has changed that dramatically, putting these functions front and center.

As global networks tottered during the early days of COVID-19, senior executives had to juggle multiple priorities while dealing with unprecedented disruptions. Keeping a cool head in such circumstances was crucial, says Chris Ewer, vice-president for *Janssen Pharmaceutical Cos.* Supply Chain (Asia Pacific).

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"In the early days, our challenge was to adjust forecast plans to accommodate the sudden surge in demand for medicines, while at the same time we had to manage our shrinking workforce," Ewer *said in an interview*.

China Welcomes RCEP

The signing of the multilateral Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) has been hailed as a victory for the Asian region, and particularly China, after another the failure of another regional free trade agreement that the country was not a part of, the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

China sees the trade deal with both major economies and smaller countries in Asia - which notably excludes the US - as accelerating its manufacturing, trade and services, including R&D and medical treatment. The government hopes to bring in more novel drugs and medical devices and promote the trade of pharmaceutical ingredients, for which the country is already the world's largest manufacturer and exporter.

No Pfizer India Vaccine Alliance?

Leading vaccine developers like J&J and *AstraZeneca PLC* have already contracted production of their coronavirus vaccines to companies based in India, and with every announcement from a major multinational, speculation begins to mount over which local partner will be chosen to meet the enormous expected demand.

While *Pfizer Inc.* looks like it is *unlikely to tie up* with Indian companies soon for manufacture of its mRNA vaccine as it has already built capacity for the first phase, discussions to supply to the COVAX facility and developing countries progress could be evaluated later.

Pandemic Hits Korean R&D

The South Korean pharma/biotech industry, which has been focusing on globalization and cross-border partnerships in recent years, is seeing its own overseas business and clinical trial activities, and the activities of global partners, *increasingly affected* by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Several major firms are facing delays in studies and drug approvals, while others are experiencing difficulties stemming from the prolonged situation. Under social and travel restrictions, trials have been impacted by temporary closures, suspensions or outright terminations, while some planned studies have been postponed, delayed or cancelled. *(This article has been made free access to non-subscribers.)*

Japan Love For Gene Therapy

In a move reflecting continued interest in gene therapies in Japan, *Anges, Inc.* is paying $258m *to* *acquire the remainder* of the private US genome editing bioventure *Emendo Biotherapeutics* it doesn't already own, as the Japanese firm looks to build its capabilities and become more of an international leader in genetic medicine.

Emendo will bring with it a broad pipeline of early-stage assets that will help build out AnGes's currently limited research portfolio, and bring valuable expertise the Japanese firm sees as applicable across broad indications, including cancer, CNS and ophthalmology disorders.

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