AUSTRALIA

New Cooperative Research Center for Cancer Therapeutics in Melbourne

The Australian Government has committed A$37.6 million (US$29.6 million) to a new New Cooperative Research Center for Cancer Therapeutics to be based in Melbourne. The new CRC-CT will be a world-class research organization headquartered at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute Biotechnology Center in Melbourne, Victoria. Seven of Australia’s leading research organizations, together with London-based company Cancer Research Technology, ASX-listed biotech Bionomics (Australia) and Sydney-based Millipore/Chemicon (Australia) are collaborating on this project.

CRC-CT will draw on significant investments already made in drug discovery infrastructure in Victoria, Queensland and South Australia. Organizations participating in CRC-CT include: Bio21 Australia Limited, Melbourne; Bionomics Limited, Adelaide; Cancer Council of Victoria, Melbourne Cancer Research Technology Limited, London; CSIRO Molecular Health Technologies, Melbourne; Griffith University, Brisbane; Millipore/Chemicon Corporation, Sydney; Monash University/Victorian College of Pharmacy, Melbourne; Peter MacCallum Cancer Center, Melbourne; St Vincent’s Institute, Melbourne; and Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, Melbourne.

The CRC-CT will be dedicated to the discovery and development of novel small molecules for targeted cancer therapies with the aim of producing drug candidates for commercialization. CRC-CT will focus on new therapies which disrupt blood vessels that feed cancers, preventing cancer cells invading other parts of the body; minimize the side effects of chemo- and radiotherapies; and decrease resistance of tumors to chemotherapies.
WEHI Collaborates with Genentech to Develop New Cancer Drugs

The Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research (WEHI) announced that it has entered into an exclusive global collaboration agreement with the California-based biotech company Genentech Inc to discover, develop, manufacture and commercialize a new class of broad spectrum cancer therapeutics.

Under the terms of the agreement, Genentech will make upfront and research program payments with the further possibility of milestone and royalty payments in the future. The agreement builds on basic scientific research carried out at WEHI over recent years, specifically regarding the therapeutic potential of regulating the activity of proteins that control the normal and healthy process of cell death called apoptosis.

Professor Adams emphasizes that WEHI’s first priority is to ensure that cancer patients directly benefit from the results of their fundamental research, and this collaboration which combines WEHI’s world-class science with Genentech’s expertise in drug development, may support the development of lead compounds into effective anti-cancer drugs. The research teams at WEHI also include those led by Professors Peter Colman, Suzanne Cory, Andreas Strasser and Drs David Huang, Keith Watson, Ian Street and Jonathan Baell.

Australia Prepares to Vaccinate its Entire Population Against Bird Flu

The Australian drug manufacturer, CSL, has successfully completed clinical trials on its bird flu vaccine. Developed with government backing, the new vaccine is the first to be registered in the Australia and could later be made available for supply and stockpile in Asia. CSL, the world top plasma products maker, said trials just completed showed two 30 mg doses of its vaccine delivered three weeks apart produced a strong immune response against the deadly H5N1 avian flu virus in adults aged 18 to 65. Results of a subsequent study on infants, young children and the elderly would be available later this year. The company is gearing up to produce the vaccine in large quantities at very short notice. CSL confirmed that it will be able to vaccinate Australia’s entire 20 million population against bird flu within six months.

China

China Revokes Licenses of 160 Drug Firms

In a bid to clean up the pharmaceutical industry in 2006, the State Food and Drug Administration revoked the business licenses of 160 drug manufacturers and retailers in a bid to clean up the pharmaceutical industry in 2006. The Chinese drug supervision authorities have inspected pharmaceutical companies across China over the past year and revoked the licenses of those companies that had irregular purchase and sale records, advertised illegally, worked beyond their business scope, and leased or transferred their licenses without authorization. They inspected 3,972 drug wholesalers and 40,152 drug retailers in 2006. The authorities also revoked the Good Sales Practice certificates, a must for the drug manufacturers, of 135 companies.

Three More National Laboratories to be Set up at CAS

The Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology has recently given green light to the establishment of another 10 national laboratories in 2007, among which three will be at CAS. The three CAS-affiliated laboratories will be the National Laboratory of Magnetic Confinement and Nuclear Fusion at the CAS Institutes of Physical Sciences in Hefei, the National Laboratory of Clean Energy at the CAS Dalian Institute of Chemical Physics and the National Laboratory of Protein Science at the CAS Institute of Biophysics. The key laboratories are built to meet national strategic demands and hunt for leaders and principal investigators across the world. The newly approved laboratories cover a wide range of scientific fields, including marine, aeronautics, health and population, nuclear and new energy sources, advanced manufacturing, optimum system manipulation, protein
and rail traffic. The construction will be co-headed by the Ministry of Education, State Commission of Science Technology and Industry for National Defense, the Ministry of Health as well as CAS. In addition to CAS institutes, other institutions involved are the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Nanjing University, and Beihang University.

**Covance Expands Operations in China**

New Jersey-based Covance announced it will open a central laboratory in Shanghai, China, to further strengthen the company’s global network of full-service central laboratories and meet the growing demand for clinical trials conducted in China. In addition, to accommodate the growth of its clinical trial management services in China, Covance is relocating its existing clinical development office in Beijing to the Derun Building in Beijing’s Central Business District. The new purpose-built 13,000-square-foot central laboratory will be located in the Zhangjiang Hi-Technology Park in Pudong, Shanghai. The facility is expected to be fully equipped, staffed and ready to support clinical trials by the fourth quarter of 2007 with central laboratory testing and specimen management services.

**CAS Launches a New Round of Academician Selection with Strict Procedures**

Established in 1955, the CAS now has 691 academicians. The title of academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), China’s top scientific organization, will be bestowed on 60 people following a strict selection process in 2007. The new round of academician selection was launched on January 18 and at most 60 people will be selected this year, according to CAS. Candidates, if they wish to become an academician, have to win the recognition of two thirds of the voting panel, composed of a majority of incumbent academicians. Candidates can be recommended by ministries, military institutions and provincial organizations or nominated by academicians. A committee of at least 11 researchers and professors will develop a short list of candidates which will be voted on by CAS members in the second half of this year. To guarantee the authenticity of the selection of candidates, the members of the public can voice objections to the CAS before September 15. The names of candidates will be publicized on the CAS official website and in the media. The names of the newly-elected academicians will be made public in December. Selection as a CAS academician is a lifetime honor and new academy members are selected biannually.

**China Slashes Cost of Overpriced Drugs**

China will slash the price of more than 240 drugs by 20% while increasing the price of about 100 other medicines that are in high demand. This is the 17th cut in the cost of drugs since the government resumed price controls over some drugs in September, 2005. This is an attempt to control soaring health care costs. The price cuts directed by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) has taken effect. Some drugs in this round of price cuts will be slashed by as much as 85%, saving consumers about 7 billion yuan (US$900 million), said the NDRC. The NDRC investigated the difference between the production costs and retail prices of a number of medicines before finalizing its price reduction plan. The NDRC slashed the prices of 67 cancer drugs by an average of 23% in June and cut the price of 32 traditional Chinese medicines used in cancer treatment by an average of 14.5% in November. Those price cuts saved consumers a total of 7.9 billion yuan (US$ 1.01 billion).

**New Diabetic Drug Manufactured in Shanghai**

Huayi Group plans to invest about 100 million yuan (US$12.9 million) in a pilot project to manufacture a medicine for diabetics that it developed through its own research. A plant to make the medicine will be located in Shanghai’s Nanhui International Medical Science Park and will cover an area of about five hectares when completed. The new drug, named “yishengtai,” is “China’s first effort in developing drugs for diabetics by using its own intellectual
property rights. The company has applied to the State for patent. Clinical experiments on the drug began in 2004 after it was registered with the State Drug and Food Administration. The company said the new drug will be better than those already available from overseas pharmaceutical companies because it will both stimulate insulin secretion and inhibit glucagon secretion when blood glucose is elevated. The company will select 240 diabetic patients as required for clinical trials to be held at seven hospitals in Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and Nanjing in Jiangsu Province. A third phase tests will start in March of next year and continue until 2009. If everything goes smoothly, the new drug will be on sale in late 2009.

JAPAN

Japan Confirms 32nd Mad Cow Case

Japan confirmed its 32nd case of mad cow disease recently, extending its record as the only Asian country to have verified the brain-wasting disease in its herd. A cow, born in August 2001 in a farm on the northern island of Hokkaido, was tested positive for mad cow disease, also known as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). Meat, innards and other parts of the cow will be incinerated so that they are not used as animal fodder or as food for people.

Japan last year resumed imports of US beef, which were suspended for most of the previous two and a half years due to fears over mad cow disease. The ban caused a rift between the close allies.

New Bird Flu Outbreak Suspected in Japan

The Agriculture Ministry said that a new outbreak of bird flu is suspected in Japan after 23 birds died at a poultry farm in the southwestern prefecture of Miyazaki, the country’s biggest poultry producing region recently. If confirmed, it would be the fourth bird flu case reported in Japan since the beginning of this year. The authorities are conducting preliminary tests on chickens at the farm, which keeps about 93,000 birds for their eggs. There have been no reported cases of human infection from the virus in Japan. The H5N1 virus has killed at least 164 people worldwide since 2003, most of them in Asia, and over 200 million birds have died from it or have been culled to prevent its spread.
**INDONESIA**

**Indonesia to Declare Bird Flu a National Disaster**

Indonesia will declare bird flu a national disaster, giving the government access to special funds to combat the disease that has killed 63 people nationwide. The authorities are preparing for the compulsory slaughter of thousands of backyard chickens as part of high-profile efforts to fight the H5N1 bird flu virus. Indonesia, which has tallied more than a third of the world’s human deaths from H5N1, has come under criticism for failing to crack down on bird flu when it first appeared in poultry stocks nearly four years ago. Past efforts to carry out mass slaughters have failed in part because the cash-strapped government said it could not afford to compensate bird owners. By declaring the disease a national disaster, it would no longer have such an excuse.

**Baxter Collaborates with the Indonesian Government**

Baxter International has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Indonesia to provide a framework for future discussions and negotiations related to any formal collaboration or supply agreements for a pandemic vaccine. The MoU does not give Baxter exclusive or proprietary access to Indonesian virus strains, nor prevent Baxter or the Indonesian government from collaborating with other public or private entities on the avian influenza problem.

Baxter has been working closely with WHO and their four collaborating centers in the UK, the US, Japan and Australia to access newly emerging influenza viruses, which the company has used in development of its candidate pandemic vaccine. Baxter has shared and continues to share information about its research and development of a candidate pandemic vaccine with WHO and global health authorities.

**Indonesia Develops a Bird Flu Vaccine**

Indonesia has developed a vaccine that may protect people against a yet-to-emerge pandemic strain of bird flu. However, there is still no word on when it would be ready for mass production. Several other countries are also working to develop vaccines that could be used against a pandemic flu strain. "We have processed it into a vaccine. However, this is still at a laboratory level. It will be not be commercialized at this stage," said Bayu Krisnamurthi, head of the country’s bird flu commission. If a pandemic bird flu strain emerges, experts say it could take up to six months before vaccines such as the one Indonesia is developing to be ready to provide full protection. Health Ministry official Nyoman Kandun said after the vaccine is ready for human use, it will likely be administered to officials who are slaughtering or working with infected chickens.

**INDIA**

**India to Carry Out First Multi-centric Clinical Trial with Stem Cells**

The Indian Council has approved the first ever multi-centric clinical trial with stem cells for Medical Research and the Department of Biotechnology, government of India, which is being monitored by the Christian Medical College Vellore. The clinical trial with stem cells for the treatment of myocardial infarctions is expected to take off soon at five hospitals in the country.

The trials will be conducted on 300 patients. The five centers are CMC Vellore, Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute (Chandigarh), Army Research and Referral Hospital (New Delhi), Institute of Medical Sciences (Lucknow) and Air Force Medical College (Pune). The trials will be supervised by Dr Jacob Jose, a cardiologist, CMC Vellore. They are slated for March–April 2007 and will span a period of 16–24 months. If the study proves favorable then use of stem cells will find an answer for myocardial infarction, which currently affect a large population in the country.
Lotus Labs and Labindia Team Up to Build a Clinical Research Academy

Lotus Labs, a pioneer in clinical research and part of the fourth largest generic pharmaceutical company in the world, has entered into a collaboration with Labindia Instruments, a leader in the field of analytical instrumentation and biotechnology to set up a clinical research academy known as Lotus Clinical Research Academy. The Academy plans to offer practical training programs tailor-made for the industry. It will provide three courses namely a certificate course in bioanalytical techniques, a courses of clinical investigators, clinical research associates (for graduates and post graduates in science and pharmacy) and a weekend clinical investigator course (for medical professionals).

The Academy’s objective is to offer these two programs which will help the industry locate quality talent to meet the ever increasing demand, and also give a competitive edge to students seeking jobs in this fast growing segment. The Academy has also invested in a state-of-the-art laboratory for the LCMSMS and HPLC courses which provides a similar work environment found in any regulated environment. For the clinical investigator course, an industrial training is also planned. There are experienced professionals to train the students and a computer laboratory to support software learning. Experts in the industry from India and abroad will be available to guide them on the dynamics of the industry. The Academy has tied up with contract research organizations and pharmaceutical companies for campus interviews.

Indian Companies to Bid for Merck’s Generics Business

Pharma majors in India are gunning for the generics business of German drug maker Merck KgaA. While Ranbaxy and Cipla have disclosed their interest in acquiring Merck’s generics business in partnership with private equity funds, Dr Reddy’s has neither confirmed nor denied the report of attempting a bid. Besides, another two companies, Sun Pharma and Wockhardt, are also considering making bids. The acquisition is likely to be valued at US$5 billion. Few generic companies in the world can match Merck’s generics business size, distribution platforms, geographical reach and technologies. As such, the sheer scale of the Merck’s generics business is hard to ignore and definitely an asset for any player. Apart from major operations and facilities in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, UK, Sweden and the US, the company also has subsidiaries in UK, Spain, Sweden and Belgium.

India and Croatia Pledge One million Euros for Scientific Research

India and Croatia have pledged a total of one million Euros (US$1.3 million) for their scientific cooperation. Both countries will equally contribute to a joint fund that has been created under a joint declaration signed during Indian Science and Technology Minister Kapil Sibal’s visit to Croatia recently. Sibal and his Croatian counterpart Dragan Primorac signed the declaration in Zagreb on the first day his visit Friday to further the Program of Cooperation in Science And Technology (2005-2008)
being implemented by India’s Department of Science and Technology and Croatia’s Ministry of Science, Education and Sports. The next meeting of the India-Croatia joint committee will be held within three months to develop modalities and identify projects to be funded in the areas of environment, oceanography, biotechnology, pharmacology, nanotechnology and shipbuilding. The two countries also agreed to collaborate in the use of GIS (geographic information system) technologies, especially in applications in coastal areas.

India to Lead in Global Stem Cell Market by 2010

A four-day annual meeting of Stem Cell Research Forum of India (SCRFI) was held in Bangalore, India recently. The event witnessed participation of over 350 delegates worldwide. More than 50 entrepreneurs, scientists and regulatory agency members delivered lectures at the conference that outlined the opportunities and progress in stem cell research. The forum gave an insight into stem cell’s immense applications in incurable diseases and its scope in the growing regenerative medicine market. SCRFI, through this event, had attempted to show a glimpse into how India can achieve that US$20 billion market contribution by 2010. The forum showed India’s potential to emerge as the largest bench-to-bedside player in stem cells research and therapy in the world. The forum impressed upon the Indian government to take essential steps in developing stem cell research and setting regulatory guidelines to meet international standards.

Biotech Leaders Receive Indian Government Awards

Dr Manju Sharma, former head of India’s biotechnology ministry and Dr Ananda M Chakrabarty, the University of Illinois scientist who made history as the first holder of a patented gene in 1981, and Dr Vilayanoor Ramachandran, the celebrated researcher on human brain based in San Diego, have been given India’s top civilian honors.

Dr Sharma, who played a key role in setting up the forerunner of the world’s first biotechnology ministry at the government level, in the early 1980s and later headed it for six years till January 2004, was given the Padma Bhushan Award, India’s third highest civilian award, on the occasion of India’s Republic Day on January 26, 2007. She was among the 121 given different categories of the Padma awards announced annually by the President of India. Under Dr Sharma’s leadership, India evolved to have one of the world’s most comprehensive set of guidelines on stem cell research and formulated a widely admired set of biosafety guidelines.

Dr Chakrabarty is the celebrated India-born scientist, now an American citizen, who fought a legal battle to win the right to patent a bacterium from the US Supreme Court in 1981. The landmark judgment by the US Supreme Court paved the way for the patenting of modified microorganisms in the US and many other countries. Dr Chakrabarty has also been advising India’s Department of Biotechnology for over two decades on strategy. A strong supporter of the Bayh-Dole Act, Dr Chakrabarty’s inputs have been vital to the formulation of similar legislation in India. India’s version of Bayh-Dole Act, that will allow private companies to access commercializable technologies from public-funded research institutions is in the final stages of formulation. Dr Chakrabarty has been given the Padma Shri Award, the fourth highest civilian honors given by the Indian government.

Dr Vilayanoor Ramachandran, a well-known neuroscientist and brain researcher at the University of California, San Diego, has also been given the Padma Bhushan Award by the government. This Chennai-born scientist is the globally known author of the theory of “phantom limbs” and is said to be one of the global scientific leaders trying to unravel the complex working of the human brain by studying the neurons.
Malaysia Opens a New Laboratory for Hazardous Disease Research

A new Biosafety Level 3 (BSL3) Complex, claimed to be first of its kind in the Asia Pacific region, was inaugurated in Malaysia in the third quarter of 2006. This new complex will aid researchers in conducting advanced research towards understanding combating strategies to hazardous diseases, including Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), the Nipah virus, avian flu, tuberculosis and anthrax. Because the current laboratories in the Veterinarian Research Institute in Ipoh and the Institute of Medical Research in Kuala Lumpur did not have ample facilities for handling large-scale research, especially during the Nipah virus outbreak in 1999 and the SARS outbreak in 2001, Malaysian researchers have been dependent on their Australian counterparts. The advanced laboratory will now help Malaysian researchers to conduct independent research to fight infectious diseases.

Philippines Bans Imports of Live Birds and Poultry from Japan

The Philippines has temporarily banned imports of live birds and poultry from Japan due to the scare over the current bird flu epidemic. According to the Agriculture Secretary, the ban is necessary to protect human health and the poultry industry in the Philippines, which has remained free of bird flu ever since the H5N1 virus strain re-emerged in Asia in 2003. The ban is based on a January, 13 report submitted by the Japanese government to an international watchdog, Office International des Epizooties (OIE), attesting to the presence of a highly pathogenic strain of bird flu AI virus in Japan. The ban covers all domestic and wild birds and their products, including day-old chicks, eggs and semen from Japan.

The World Health Organization (WHO) reported last week that 164 out of 270 people infected with the AI virus have died since the H5N1 strain of the bird flu virus resurfaced in Southeast Asia in 1993 and then spread across the rest of the continent as well as Europe, the Middle East and Africa. The Philippines, Singapore and Brunei are the only bird flu-free countries in Southeast Asia.

Singapore Keeping up Vigilance Against Infectious Diseases

Singapore has also stockpiled more than ten million Tamiflu pills, for the treatment of bird flu, as well as 50,000 courses of Relenza as a second-line drug. It is part of Singapore’s contingency plans to prepare for a possible bird flu outbreak within the country. Meanwhile, the country has been keeping up its vigilance against infectious diseases, especially as there have been suspect cases at its hospitals. Exercises have been ongoing at all healthcare institutions to familiarize staff in case of an outbreak of an infectious disease, like SARS. Meanwhile, the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority has intensified surveillance on poultry and eggs entering the country at points of entry and tested them for bird flu.
Bioboard

Ministry of Health has also contracted a vaccine producer to manufacture up to ten million doses of pandemic vaccine for Singapore’s population. Besides antivirals, Singapore has also stockpiled N95 masks and other personal protection equipment items. Since the beginning of 2006, AVA has also introduced biosegregation to poultry farms in order to minimize the risk of the spread of bird flu, in case it hits Singapore. The Health Ministry has also set out guidelines to help companies prepare for business continuity, in case of an avian flu outbreak.

Singapore Health Ministry Considering Legislation on Biomedical Research

The Singapore Health Ministry is looking at laws on biomedical research, particularly on the import of human eggs and embryos for research. The Bioethics Advisory Council has recommended the move to make sure that there is no misuse of such tissues. Currently, under the Human Cloning and Other Prohibited Practices Act, there is already a ban on the import of what is called “prohibited embryos,” or embryos more than 14 days old. But the Act does not cover eggs and embryos below that age. This means that such eggs and embryos can be brought into Singapore for research. While local doctors cannot do so as they are governed by the Medical Ethics Code, the same does not apply to foreign scientists. With research in embryonic stem cells progressing rapidly, the Bioethics Advisory Council has made recommendations to the Health Ministry to institute laws on this.

TNT Appoints Onno Boots as South East Asia’s Regional Managing Director

TNT Express, one of the world’s leading express delivery companies, has appointed Onno Boots as South East Asia’s Regional Managing Director. In this function he will report directly to James McCormac, Chief Operating Officer of TNT Express. His appointment marks TNT’s continued commitment to South East Asia and plans for further expansion in the region. Prior to his appointment, Onno served as Director of Global Account Management (Worldwide) in Amsterdam. He has served TNT for 18 years in the company’s divisional headquarters in the Netherlands. Onno will be based at the TNT Asia regional office in Singapore, with 2771 employees across the region under his charge.

South Korea

South Korea Aims to Become Top 10 Science Nation by 2010

The Ministry of Science and Technology said South Korea will strive to become a global leader in science and technology fields by 2010. Outlining its policy objectives for 2007, the ministry said the country should be able to reach tenth place in terms of scientific competitiveness and make the top five in technological capability. South Korea stood at 12th place and sixth place, respectively in scientific and technological competitiveness in a report released by the Swiss-based International Institute of Management and Development (IMD) for last year. To reach this goal, the Science Ministry, which is responsible for coordinating all state-supported research and development efforts, said it will effectively allocate the 9.8 trillion won in state R&D funds earmarked for this year. This sum is expected to reach 12.6 trillion won in 2010.

In the biotech field, the focus will be on human brain research and efforts to slow down the natural aging process. For the nanotech sector, scientists will support efforts to advance nano-mechatronics and the development of tera-level nano materials. Other areas of focus will be the buildup of the country’s atomic energy infrastructure.

Taiwan

Taiwan Works on Bird Flu Vaccine

The Taiwan government has conducted tests on animals of a vaccine that could protect people against bird flu and hopes to conduct human trials and be ready for mass production in two years. The National
Health Research Institute (NHRI) reported that, although there are still many steps and procedures before the vaccine is deemed safe, the center’s facilities would be ready to commence limited production later this year. In the case of an emergency, it would be able to produce 7,000 doses a month. The center will be able to produce 100,000 doses of the vaccine on an annual basis in house. Taiwan’s government has spent NT$40 million (US$1.2 million) on her program alone. Millions of birds have either died or been culled in China and Southeast Asia as a result of the disease.

Taiwan Introduces World’s First DNA chip

The first DNA chip in the world was introduced by Biowell Technology Inc after two years of research. Inside the DNA chip is synthesized DNA, which can be identified by a device similar to an identification card or a credit card reader. The DNA chip can be used as an authentication mechanism in many applications, according to Hsu Jun-Jei, chairman and chief technology officer of Biowell.

The DNA chip can also be used on passports, credit cards, debit cards, membership cards, driver’s licenses, automobile license plates, CDs, VCDs, DVDs, notebooks, PDAs, computer software, certificates, stocks, bonds, bank account books, semiconductor chip packages, important documents, antiques, paintings, labels, paints, inks, and many other applications in which authentication is required. The synthesized DNA inside the DNA chip generates DNA signals which only the company’s readers can detect and authenticate in two seconds. Because the DNA signals so generated cannot be artificially reproduced, the authentication technology of Biowell is the most advanced in the world, even compared with other authentication techniques such as those relying on human fingerprints, palm prints, human voice, IC chips, laser marks, etc. With the DNA authentication technology, losses caused by pirated and fake products can be minimized substantially. Company officials disclosed that the company has received an order from Brazil. Currently Biowell has a monthly production capacity of 2.5 million pieces of DNA chips.

THAILAND

Bird Flu Strikes in Thailand Again

The Thai Agriculture Ministry recently announced that the H5N1 bird flu virus has reappeared in a third Thai province. All fowl in the immediate area around the outbreak in Ang Thong province, 105 km (65 miles) north of Bangkok were being slaughtered after 16 fighting cocks were confirmed to have died of bird flu. The laboratory test has confirmed that the virus found in the province was the deadly H5N1. The virus reappeared in Thailand recently, in two provinces in the north and northeast. Thailand’s previous outbreak of the virus in poultry was in July 2006, and the last human death in August, the country’s 17th since the virus re-emerged in Asia in late 2003.

Thai Pharma Industry Against Thai Government’s Decision to Produce Generic Drugs

Thailand, which provides free medical care for the poor, is clashing with the pharmaceutical industry by becoming the first country to approve a generic version of a heart disease drug that is seen as highly effective and widely used. The army-backed government has decided to allow imports of cheaper generic forms of Plavix, the world’s second top-selling medicine, and AIDS drug Kaletra. Plavix, a blood-thinning treatment to prevent heart attacks, costs 120 baht (US$3.50) per pill. Only 20% of heart disease patients in Thailand have access to the life-saving medicine. The generic version approved last month will cost only six to 12 baht per pill (US$0.35). This decision has drawn outrage from drug companies who say it damages Thailand’s image in the global business community. But the government responded that it is acting in line with WTO rules. Thailand’s top pharmaceutical group, which comprises 38 drug firms, has slammed the government’s decision, saying it was “a stunning blow” to foreign investment in the kingdom. But the government dismissed the criticism and said it would start importing the generic Plavix, as well as the generic anti-retroviral AIDS drug Kaletra, from India 2007.