For the new plant, investments of around US$25 million will be pumped in. The plant is expected to be ready in 18 months and the company is in the final stages of negotiations with the Economic Development Board (EDB).

About 200,000 GeneChips were sold last year and with the advent of biotech, Affymetrix expects 400,000 to be sold this year. Although GeneChips are now mostly used for basic research, experts predict that biochips such as these will be used more widely in applications such as clinical trials and diagnosis in the future.

Ranbaxy to Quit Joint Venture with Eli Lilly

India's leading pharmaceutical company, Ranbaxy Laboratories, has decided to sell its 50 percent stake in its joint venture company with Eli Lilly — Ranbaxy Eli Lilly. Eli Lilly is acquiring the stake for US$17 million. This will increase its shareholding in the joint venture company to 100 percent.

Eli Lilly is willing to acquire the stake subject to government clearances. The company hopes that the move will enable it to position itself as one of the top companies in India. It also hopes to establish itself in local research and development. Eli Lilly will continue to manufacture bulk drugs and formulations that are commercially, technically and economically viable in India.

According to an Eli Lilly spokesperson, the company has identified clinical research as one of its main areas of focus, and India would serve as a major research center in the future.

Eli Lilly is planning to increase its research investments in India significantly, and has some very promising drugs in the pipeline. These drugs are mainly for the treatment of cancer, cardiovascular disorders, diabetes and sepsis. Clinical trials for these drugs will be conducted in India based on protocols set by the Indian health ministry.

As for Ranbaxy, it decided on the move in order to invest funds into its own companies and exit from businesses which it views as not strategic.

Japanese Firm Starts Clinical Trial of HIV Drug

Japan's Zeria Pharmaceutical Company has recently started clinical trials of a drug used to combat the human immuno-deficiency virus (HIV). The clinical trials are being conducted in the US following approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Zeria Pharmaceutical, which is based in Tokyo, said that the drug is currently used in Japan under the name “Answer 20.” Preliminary research conducted at the University of Texas shows that the drug can stop the HIV from invading other cells. In cancer patients, the drug has been shown to limit the drop of leukocytes following radiotherapy.

A spokesperson for the company said that the mechanism of action of Answer 20 is different from that of existing anti-AIDS drugs. He said that combined use of Answer 20 with existing anti-AIDS drug would provide a more effective treatment for those suffering from AIDS.