

Indian Vaccines six times less expensive

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After data processing, biotechnology and the genetic engineering constitute the second pillar of the takeoff of Andhra Pradesh. Several laboratories and centers of production settle in Hyderabad.

The State wants to go even further with the creation of "Knowledge Park" One morning at the beginning of March. The telephone sounds in the office of Krishna Ella, owner of Bharat Biotech, pharmaceutical company based on the genetics, located in Hyderabad. From the other end of the wire, a representative of a Anglo-American multinational requests an urgent appointment. The two men see themselves the following day. The conversation relates to Revac-B, a new vaccine against hepatitis B developed at the point by Bharat Biotech, and which with the wire of the months did not cease nibbling the Indian market, but also African and South American. The World Health Organization (WHO) should be also supplied soon in Hyderabad.

The arrival of Revac-B actually chahute the market. For example, GlaxoSmithKline, formerly one of the principal world suppliers of vaccines against hepatitis B, had to lower the price of its amount from 12 to 4 dollars in India, but its sales did not finish tumbling down. And due: Bharat Biotech provides the vaccine to 2 dollars. WHO evaluates to a million the number of people who die each year in the world following the complications related to hepatitis B. What pushed certainly the international organization to recommend the vaccination generalized in all the countries. Competition also comes from a second company, Shantha Biotech, it also installed in Hyderabad. This one knows a growth striking down thanks to strategic alliance with American Pfizer for the marketing of the vaccine and a partial delocalization with San Diego, on the West coast of the United States, for the production of an antibody against the lung cancer.

The young employer of Bharat Biotech swears that the question of a multinational alliance with any is not on the agenda. "It is time that the Indian industry based on the life sciences emerges and makes its place under the sun, underlines Krishna Ella, microbiologist of formation, which made career and fortune in the United States. We have the raw materials. We have competences." Indeed, in addition to information technologies, the State d' Andhra Pradesh melts its hopes in the development of an industry based biotechnology and the genetic engineering. "This sector, which currently employs 20,000 people only, can play a driving part in the development of Andhra Pradesh", insists Sheela Bhide, cheffe of cabinet to the Ministry for Industry. For the time being, besides some openings in the biomedical field, the Indian researchers worked especially in agriculture. The high-output hybrid seeds already made it possible the country to be self-sufficing out of cereals. Vegetables and fruits transgenic from now on resistant to the endemic diseases flood the market. "XXIe century will be that of biotechnology", wrote Sheela Bhide in a communication with the political decision makers of Andhra Pradesh. This woman, who made studies in Geneva, is charged to promote Hyderabad like a center of excellence for the life sciences. "Our city is a fish pond which produces hundreds of scientists who, far lack of opportunities on our premises, expatrient themselves in the United States. We want that these people return and assemble their own company", says it. It is not a question of a pious wish since several Indian professionals, like Krishna Ella de Bharat Biotech, actually returned to the fold. Sheela Bhide recalls that Hyderabad has also a network of research centers of world reputation.

Among them, the Center for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), an official laboratory, took part in the international research project on the human genome and prepares now, in collaboration with the private sector, to develop remedies for the genetic diseases. Kits of diagnosis for certain infections are already on the market.

"We want to incite the Indian and foreign researchers to settle on our premises", increases Dr. Subba Rao, director of Knowledge Park. In process of installation in Turkapally, 35 km of the downtown area, this place wants to play a driving part for the emergent industry based on biotechnology. "Of the Swiss companies which have difficulties in carry out experiments on the GMO are the welcomes on our premises", smiles it.

Dr. Rao obviously is very encouraged by the inauguration of a first laboratory in Knowledge Park in February. He recalls that Indian researchers are amongst best world, but are not expensive.

Inevitably, the question of intellectual protection arises, more especially as India is regarded as a champion of the counterfeit. Krishna Ella points out that the agreement of the World Organization of Trade (OMC) on the patents will be valid in India since 2004 only. By then only the manufacturing processes, and not the product itself, are protected. "The Revac-B vaccine thus does not violate any law", insists it. And to add that it is itself for the total respect of intellectual patents for the future products of Bharat Biotech." The CCMB defends the same position. The number of its patents deposited in the United States amounts of fourteen, against zero in 1998. And the Indian scientists ensure that it is only on beginning.