

2 more pharma giants could set up shop here

Talks ongoing with global firms to invest in large projects

BY AMRESH GUNASINGHAM

GIANT pharma firms setting up shop here will continue to pump large amounts of money into research next year.

The Government is in advanced discussions with two more global players to invest in large projects here, revealed Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*Star) chairman Lim Chuan Poh yesterday, without elaborating.

Two big firms have already announced plans to invest in research this year.

Medical technology company

Roche announced the setting up of a \$100 million research centre for “translational medicine” in January, while German pharma giant Bayer-Schering last week announced that it would put \$14.5 million into cancer research here.

In September, the Government also announced that it would invest \$16 billion in research over the next five years.

Of this, \$3.5 billion will be pumped into biomedical sciences in a bid to make the burgeoning industry a major economic contributor.

This represents a 12 per cent increase in funding for research into biomedical sciences over the preceding five years.

The Government also hopes to encourage private sector investment in R&D to hit 2.5 per cent of projected gross domestic product (GDP) by

2015. The idea is to make Singapore one of the most R&D-intensive economies in the region.

By the end of next year, the Government expects private investment in R&D to reach 2 per cent of GDP, which may enable Singapore to meet targets sooner.

In his address to an audience of educators, students and scientists at the opening of a new research facility at the National University of Singapore (NUS), Mr Lim said the recent push to attract funding from industry was paying dividends.

The A*Star chairman was speaking yesterday at the official opening of the \$24 million Centre for Bio-imaging Sciences at NUS, a facility that will be headed by Professor Paul Matsudaira, who is also the dean of NUS' school of biological sciences.

“Bio-imaging has the potential to play a pivotal role in research, especial-

ly when used to visualise how cancers, metabolism and genes express themselves in animal tissues,” said Mr Lim.

The new centre will house some of the most advanced microscopes available, such as the cryoelectron microscope, which allows scientists to view images in 3-D at the atomic level.

There are only 15 cryoelectron microscopes in the world and Singapore will be only the second country in Asia to possess it. China is also believed to have the \$5 million device.

The powerful microscope will be used to advance research in infectious and neurodegenerative diseases and plant biology.

It was also announced yesterday that NUS' department of biological sciences will offer a new programme for doctorate students seeking to enter the field.

To attract applicants from a range of disciplines who will go on to become engineers, biologists and chemists, the programme will also be offered at two other schools.

Apart from students at NUS' faculty of science and engineering, it will be open to those at Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School and the Mechanobiology Institute of Singapore, said Prof Matsudaira.

He said NUS eventually hopes to enrol 12 to 14 PhD students every year.

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