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ASIA EDITION

Bio-XCell emerges as bio-hotspot in Malaysia

September 18, 2012 | Influencers | By BioSpectrum Bureau



Mr Rizatuddin Ramli, CEO, Bio-XCell, Malaysia, is on his toes to deliver the objectives of phase II of Malaysia's National Biotechnology Policy. At Bio-XCell's office, Mr Ramli offers a warm welcome to *BioSpectrum* and shows around the site, while sharing information about the project and plans for the future. Excerpts from the interview.

What is the contribution of the biotech industry to Malaysia's economy?
The biotech industry generates around $4.34 billion (RMB13.5 billion) revenue and comprises 2.2 percent of the country's gross domestic product. By 2015, the grow rate of expected to be four percent. The industry has created 54,760 jobs and, once the biotech park gets operational, it will create 3,000 more job opportunities in the next five years. We will engage around 20 percent of foreign talent to support the industry. Malaysia is also grooming its students and professionals to get equipped with the skills required by the biotech industry.

What kind of alliances is Bio-XCell developing with its Asian counterparts?
Bio-XCell has signed deals with a couple of multinational companies. BiotechCorp has tied up with Korea Research Institute of Bioscience and Biotechnology for providing specific training to Malaysian graduates who have completed the Biotechnology Special Training (BeST) Program in bioprocess-related areas. Around 600 students are expected to participate in this program in Korea. Later, once the site is operational, training facilities can be arranged at Bio-XCell.

What kind of space does Bio-XCell provide to start-up companies? Will domestic companies get a boost with this infrastructure?
Bio-XCell has designs to accommodate medium-to-small scale companies too with required facilities. The soon-to-be-launched central hub is a multipurpose complex with a variety of offices and lab space. This focal point of the park will be a place buzzing with activity and will provide a collaborative environment to support the development of biotech community.
Companies renting the space can kick-start their operations in the quickest and the simplest way by utilizing the value-added services, such as high-speed internet connectivity, business center, business lounge, auditorium, conference and meeting rooms.

There is also an incubator lab design for supporting start-up companies with ample support. As we progress, we will see greater participation from local companies in R&D projects. We will encourage partnerships between local companies and resident foreign companies. MNCs will also create spin-off businesses in biotechnology and related services for local participants, such as those dealing in equipment, instrumentation and logistics. We can also expect a fair amount of knowledge transfer and specialized skill enhancement in strengthening our pool of human capital for the industry.

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What are the prime sources of funding for Bio-XCell and how much has been invested so far?
Our main source of funds comes from our shareholders, BiotechCorp and UEM Land. In March 2011, we entered into an agreement with Malayan Banking for $79 million (RM250 million). Commodity Murabahah Term Financing - Islamic Facility (CMTF-i) will also partly fund the completion of phase I of Bio-XCell.

The phase I development entails an investment of $301 million (RM950 million), funded by foreign direct investments, Islamic debts and shareholders' equity. This reflects strong market acceptance and confidence in the project, including its value propositions. Bio-XCell is the first dedicated and managed biotechnology park for Malaysia.