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ASIA EDITION

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In sync with the recent vaccine trends, South Korea-based contract development and manufacturing organization (CDMO), Samsung Biologics is all set to add mRNA vaccine drug substance manufacturing suite to expand its portfolio of services. In conversation with BioSpectrum Asia, James Choi, Senior VP, Chief Information and Marketing Officer, and Head of Investor Relations, Samsung Biologics, South Korea, talks in detail about the company's growth plans



What big plans are in store to enhance the global production of mRNA vaccines in the future?

As part of our long-term growth strategy to serve the varying needs of our clients and the biopharma industry, we've been expanding our business portfolio and production capacity to meet the growing demand in mRNA manufacturing services. Apart from the agreement in late May this year for the aseptic fill-finish as well as packaging and labeling of Moderna's COVID-19 mRNA vaccine, we recently announced plans to add an mRNA drug substance suite to our site by the first half of 2022 to diversify our service offerings. We see great potential for mRNA technology to address a broader range of diseases, beyond COVID-19.

What could be the challenges and bottlenecks associated with mRNA vaccine manufacturing?

Bio-manufacturing has a high barrier to entry as it requires extensive investment in GMP-compliant facilities, equipment, and procedures. Managing a talent based skill in mRNA along with state-of-the-art technology are imperatives to ensure the consistent delivery of safe and high-quality products. At Samsung Biologics, our team of experts are ready, and our aim is to have everything in place to commence drug substance manufacturing of mRNA vaccines by the first half of 2022.

What is the projected growth figure for FY 21-22? What's being planned for the remaining part of the year?

Our first-quarter financial performance was in line with our expectations and provided us with a strong start to 2021. Since then, we have maintained solid performance and momentum from our expanding CDMO business globally, while stably managing our ongoing projects across our plants 1, 2, and 3, which have been at near full operation amid the pandemic.

For the rest of the year, the construction of our new Plant 4 will remain on track with active pre-sales discussions. Our US R&D Center in South San Francisco is fully equipped and operational to support our global clients. We will also make continuous advancements in our biosimilar subsidiary, global manufacturing capacity, and new business models.

What further investments are you planning for 2022 and beyond?

We recently began substantial investments in further expansion of biologic drug substance and aseptic filling capacities. Our business planning currently includes three areas of expansion: capacity expansion, such as adding additional capacities and capabilities to our second Bio Campus next to our headquarters, geographical expansion to improve client support on a global scale as demonstrated by the opening of our US R&D Center last year, and platform expansion as previously mentioned to provide more diversified, multimodal state-of-the-art infrastructure.

We also published our annual sustainability report, which consolidates our policies for an enhanced ESG management system as well as showcasing our ongoing commitment and long-term strategy for social responsibility. In the next ten years, we plan to expand our environmental investments in response to climate change, focus on reducing corporate energy consumption, and participate in the Carbon Disclosure Project. We also will strengthen our collaborative efforts with domestic bio-ventures for the localisation of raw materials and fostering of bio-talent.

How do you foresee the growth of the CDMO sector within Asia in years to come?

In recent years, we've seen exceptional growth in the CDMO sector within Asia, especially in South Korea as the industry has become increasingly globally competitive. Despite being in its early stages, the Korean biotechnology industry continues to invest, build, and establish a robust bio-cluster.

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