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Life Technologies to tap genetic sequencing market

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Life Technologies, a US-based biotechnology company with customers in more than 160 countries, introduced a new benchtop Ion Proton Sequencer in India designed to sequence the entire human genome in a day for $1,000. Optical-based sequencing technologies take weeks or months to sequence a human genome and cost $5,000 to $10,000.

The Ion Proton Sequencer, priced at $149,000, is based on next generation semiconductor sequencing technology that made its predecessor, the Ion Personal Genome Machine, the fastest-selling sequencer in the world. It isÃ?Â ideal for sequencing both exomes - regions in the DNA that code for protein - and human genomes. The Ion Proton I Chip will be available from mid-2012, while the Ion Proton II Chip will be available about six months later. The product will be currently available for research purpose till the company gets the regulatory approval for animal or human therapeutic or diagnostic use, which is

expected by the end of this year.

BioSpectrum spoke to Mr Gregory T Lucier, chairman and CEO, Life Technologies, USA, while he was in Bangalore, India, to launch the Ion Proton Sequencer about the market trends in India and the APAC region.

What kind of growth do you see for this product in the region?

Mr Lucier: The Ion Proton Sequencer is now our fastest growing product. We see a lot of potential for this new product and are expecting a high double-digit growth rate for this product in the Asia Pacific region. Over the next three years, the market for genetic sequencing will be measured in tens of millions of dollars.

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When will it be ready for diagnostic use in India?

Mr Lucier: Already a couple of diagnostic labs are working on Ion Torrent technology. What needs to be done in diagnostics is validation by the regulatory authority that may take six-to-nine months. The labs have already started looking at what could be the possible applications of this product, which is needed to get a final approval from regulatory authorities. By the next year, DCGI and other regulatory agencies will have robust data on Ion Torrent, which will help us take the product to the market after the approval.

The industry is of the opinion that affordability is key to enter emerging markets like India. What are your thoughts on affordability of the product?

Mr Lucier: We need to look at the functionality of the product. Last year, the same kind of product cost over $500,000. We see a massive economic shift happening in research and development. This proton device will run on two chips so far. In future, chips will be able to add more value to genetic sequencing. We are already working closely with regulatory agencies for commercializing the product.

Are you planning to invest in a manufacturing facility and increase resources in the country?

Mr Lucier: We see growth in R&D and have a global R&D center in Bangalore. All our antibody development and antibody research are being done here for all Life Technologies organizations.

We are also looking at setting up a manufacturing facility in Bangalore. It is in planning stage. We are looking at developing products in India, for India and manufactured in India. Hopefully, it will be in place before the end of this year.

In India, we will be hiring close to 100 professionals this year. As we make more decisions, we will hire more. These will be for research, training, sales functions and business development.

What kind of growth rate will you expect from the Asia Pacific region?

Mr Lucier: The fastest growing region for the company is Asia Pacific and within that definitely India is the fastest growing market of all.

We are growing at over 20 percent in India and China. We see equal growth potential in the two countries. Besides these, Singapore is a very good market. Korea is another major market. Surprisingly, Australia is also a growth market. We are looking at a growth rate of about 15-to-20 percent in the region.

Has the global economic slowdown affected the company?

Mr Lucier: There was definitely some impact because of the crisis in the western countries last year. However, we don't see much impact this year. Our business is more resilient and protective than other industries.

Are you looking at acquisitions for growth?

Mr Lucier: We did acquired a France-based animal healthcare diagnostic company in the first week of March.

What challenges is Life Technologies facing in India and APAC?

Mr Lucier: In India, our challenges will be to continue to set up better logistic network, train the sales force to sell more sophisticated products and lastly develop new offerings for the India market at lower prices with little less sophistication that will be essential products for the labs in India.