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Ã¢â?¬Å?APAC has one of the fastest drug discovery innovation speeds in the worldÃ¢â?¬Â•

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US-headquartered West Pharmaceutical Services, Inc., a global leader in innovative solutions for injectable drug administration, has recently inaugurated its newly advanced manufacturing facility in Jurong, Singapore. This is part of West's commitment to invest more than $350 million globally in 2023. Alagu Subramaniam, Senior Director, Sales and Commercial Operations, Asia Pacific, West Pharmaceutical Services shares more details about this new facility in a candid chat with BioSpectrum Asia.



How will the new facility benefit Singapore’s thriving pharmaceutical and biomedical ecosystem?

The Singapore Jurong plant is now more than four decades old and has played a key role in servicing our customers and patients in their needs, both locally and regionally in the healthcare industry.

With the upgrade, West is now able to manufacture advanced, high-quality containment products for injectable drugs from start to finish in a single location, which will reduce overall lead time in production. This enables us to offer a world-class supply chain to our customers across the region and help deliver life-saving drugs, life-enhancing solutions, and revolutionary medicines to patients quickly.

The Jurong facility is the only one in Asia Pacific (APAC) under the advanced manufacturing value stream for West and is one of the five sites for West's global high-value product (HVP) capacity expansion worldwide. With both the pharmaceutical and advanced manufacturing sectors being key to Singapore government's 'Manufacturing 2030' Plan, we believe we are in a unique position to support Singapore with its manufacturing ambitions.

In the last three years, we have invested over $700 million in capital expenditures, with the majority used to expand capacity across our existing sites, including the Jurong facility. Additionally, we are investing more than $350 million globally in 2023 to ensure that our capabilities and capacity evolve in tandem with the needs of our customers.

Lastly, this investment and upgrade supports Singapore in achieving a complete supply chain manufacturing capability for future vaccine response.

Are you recruiting new talent in this facility, and under what expertise?

As part of the upgrade and investment in the new facility, we have already created over 200 new jobs, and are expecting another additional 40 roles to be added by the end of this year. Most of them will fall under roles that can support the production of our high value products using the updated technologies.

The plant has been designed and built to accommodate expansion for multiple product lines in the future. This translates into more opportunities for the country's workforce in the future.

Why did you zero-in on Singapore? What are your plans for the other Asian countries?

There is a high concentration of global players and industry leaders in the country, cementing Singapore's place as a leading hub of biomedical sciences in Asia. These factors played a pivotal role when the Jurong facility was chosen for the upgrade.

West is a clear market leader in APAC, with significant presence across the key markets including India, China, South Korea, and Australia. Having served the Indian and Chinese markets since the 1990s, we have continued to expand our presence in both countries. For example, we have established a manufacturing facility in Sri City 2014 and the first Digital Technology Centre (DTC) in 2019 in India. In Mainland China, we have two manufacturing facilities in Shanghai, training talent and creating top quality components for injectable drugs.

This is also our strategy for South Korea, where we first established a presence in the 1980s, and expanded our footprint within the country in 2019.

Our focus is to continuously enhance our manufacturing capabilities to benefit the wider region, while maintaining high quality and safety standards.

How do you view business opportunities in the APAC region, besides Singapore?

The APAC region is ripe with opportunities for growth and development and has one of the fastest drug discovery innovation speeds in the world. As an example, India's biotechnology industry is expected to reach $300 billion by 2030, with a growth rate of 14 per cent in 2022 alone. In China, guided by its national strategy of Healthy China 2030 and driven by factors such as the changing demographics, growth in the pharmaceutical sector is expected to remain strong.

Our footprint across the region is strategically positioned in key markets. With the upgrade of our Jurong facility and our continued investment across the region, we are in a stronger position than ever to meet the needs of the growing critical changes in healthcare and drug delivery both globally and regionally.

West, in its fiscal year 2022, generated $2.89 billion in net sales. What percent was brought in by the APAC region? How much growth are you expecting this year?

We have been very steady in our growth in the region and over the years have established ourselves to be a clear market leader in APAC. 2022 was a great year for us and we made significant contributions to the overall sales for West. The results

were very encouraging not just from Singapore but also our facilities in China and India. We are looking to maintain momentum and grow more in APAC.

Currently, we are seeing an increasing demand for HVPs especially in the biologics sector. With the upgrades to the Jurong facility, we are expecting this trend to grow upwards which will support our commitment and growth in the coming years.

What are your major plans in store for the APAC region in the coming years?

We look at APAC as a growth engine for us with one of the fastest drug discovery innovation speeds in the world. It is a region that is dynamic and promising – with its top 50 biotech companies worth over $8.6 trillion.

Sitting at the heart of Asia as the region's business and manufacturing hub, Singapore plays an integral role in strengthening West's footprint and manufacturing network in Asia Pacific.

As mentioned earlier, our focus is to continuously enhance our manufacturing capabilities to benefit the wider region. We also remain focused on expanding our talent pool and supporting our workforce to upskill themselves as we invest more in the region.

What are the current challenges facing the biopharma and biomanufacturing sector within the APAC region?

Over the last decade, there has been a boom in clinical trials in the APAC region. According to Pharma Intelligence, APAC contributed close to half of the world's clinical trial activities in 2021. This demonstrates a steady growth for biopharma and subsequently, biomanufacturing sectors, which is very encouraging for companies like West.

This growth is influenced by a lot of factors- starting with businesses who are trying to capture the growing market of home-based healthcare. At the same time, the rise in cell and gene therapy has also triggered an increase in clinical trials. And lastly, injectable therapies are also touted to become one of the fastest growing segments of the drug industry, owing to the growth of biologics. All of this translates into growing demand for innovative packaging and delivery solutions especially for sensitive molecules, particularly biologics.

The challenge, however, lies in meeting these increasing demands while not compromising efficacy and quality standards. The rapidly changing landscape and increasing regulatory focus on product quality add to the challenge. All this coupled with accelerated timelines to bring the products to market are factors that the industry needs to be prepared for.

There is a need to nurture understandings of the local markets and collaborate with local stakeholders to minimise interventions and roadblocks.

Dr Manbeena Chawla

(manbeena.chawla@mmactiv.com)