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# German firms looking to ink research pacts in India

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Bangalore: Almost nine months after India and Germany signed an agreement to forge alliances in science and technology research and commercialization, at least a dozen German companies and research institutes are close to signing business deals and research collaborations.

Albrecht Laufer, chief executive of BioRegion, a network of at least 200 German biotech companies, said the areas of interest include vaccines, immunology and diagnostics.

Laufer, who is participating in Bangalore Bio 2009, a three-day annual biotech event that started on Thursday, is in talks with Indian vaccine companies such as Panacea Biotec Ltd, Serum Institute of India Ltd and Shantha Biotechnics Ltd for a new tuberculosis vaccine candidate developed by Vakzine Projekt Management, a German start-up company. The vaccine is completing phase I trials in Germany.

This molecule is derived from the most widely used live vaccine today—BCG, or bacillus of Calmette and Guérin—but has been genetically engineered to be more effective. It is being hailed by the medical community as the first promising vaccine candidate in about 80 years.

Similarly, IBA GmbH, a cloning system and biology tool maker, is looking for partners in India to extend its platform technologies and build new ones. Lionex Diagnostics and Therapeutics GmbH, started by a scientist of Indian origin at the Helmholtz Center for Infection Research in Braunschweig, is in talks with Indian biotech and pharma companies to develop and manufacture diagnostic kits in India.

Referring to the synergy between the Indian and German biotech, Laufer said, "German start-ups don't have muscle, but Indian companies have muscle."

Regenerative Medicine Initiative Germany, or RMIG, is tying up with C.M. Habibullah and his team in Hyderabad, which uses stem cells for liver research at the Stem Cells Research and Therapy Centre.

"We're exploring opportunities for stem cell clinical trials in India," said Joeri Borstlap, coordinator of RMIG.

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