

# Poonawalla: “world class”

The Government of India and the biotech industry honor Dr Cyrus Poonawalla for achievements in vaccines

Hilla P. Guzder

The Padma Shri was conferred on him by the President of India in his honors list on India's Republic Day, January 26, 2005. Selected “Person of the Year 2004” by *BioSpectrum* (which covers the people, products and business of biotechnology) and Poonawalla group company Serum Institute of India chosen BioPharma Company of the year 2004, chairman and managing director Dr Cyrus Poonawalla is riding a new high.

“The Padma Shri was awarded (in the category of trade) in recognition of my putting Serum Institute of India on the global map of vaccines. We export to over 130 countries worldwide and 50 percent of children immunized in 2004 against measles and DTP (diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis) have been vaccinated with Serum Institute's vaccines,” Poonawalla told *Parsiana*. The Padma Shri is very obviously a prestigious award as it means national recognition, he added.

With revenues of over Rs 500 crore and vaccines and immunobiologicals exported from its state of the art facility at Hadapsar in Poona, the Serum Institute is recognized by the Government of India as an export and trading house.

Serum Institute has expended Rs 200 crore “on setting up of world class GMP (good manufacturing practices) premises for some very important new vaccines that are developed and are already in Phase-I clinical trials study—the conjugate meningitis vaccine, haemophilus influenzae vaccine (commonly known as

HIB vaccine) and combination vaccine where children can be protected in one shot for tetanus, diphtheria, whooping cough, Hepatitis-B and haemophilus influenzae. The expansion also involves a whole range of anti-cancer products, which have now gone off patents in the US and European Union markets,” Poonawalla told *Parsiana*.

Poonawalla was 22 when he started operations in 1966 (see “Spurs to Success,” *Parsiana*, August 2002) as a small 20-man unit, manufacturing at first tetanus antitoxin followed by fluid tetanus

toxoid. The company has steadily expanded its product portfolio and by 1999 was recognized as the largest producer of measles and DTP vaccines in the world. The year 2001 saw the Serum Institute launch the indigenously manufactured recombinant Hepatitis-B vaccine; in 2002 the BCG vaccine, in 2004 the first indigenously developed Human Diploid

Cell rabies vaccine... The company also commenced in 1997 the export of anti-cancer products, as per company sources and information available on its website [www.seruminstitute.com](http://www.seruminstitute.com)

Dr M. K. Bhan, secretary, Department of Biotechnology, Government of India, presented the Person of the Year award to Poonawalla on December 10, 2004 at a function in Bangalore attended by “over 320 key officials

from the industry, government and academic institutions.” It was one of the largest gatherings in the biotech sector, reports *BioSpectrum* in its issue of January 2005. On the choice of Person of the Year, Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, dynamic entrepreneur and head of Biocon Limited, who was chairman of the jury, stated: “Dr Cyrus Poonawalla clearly stood for all the qualities that it takes to be a leader. With his very pioneering spirit, he has built a world-class institution and put India on the vaccine map of the world. Today it is very clearly recognized that India is one of the leading vaccine producers of the world, thanks to the Serum Institute of India.”

In his acceptance speech at the awards function Poonawalla traced the differences in the enabling environment: “When I started the company in 1966, I never dreamt that the Serum Institute of India... would actually grow to its full potential. During those days, unlike today, we didn't have a proactive biotechnology department. The industry now is a much more favorable place and aspiring biotechnologists today are

much more fortunate. They would be able to go ahead much quicker than we did. We took 35 long years to come to where we are today... I have six members in my team who have not only stood by me (through long years) but also helped me to develop the company... without giving me a heartache for even a single day...

“I have been known more for my racing and breeding personality... and many of my racing colleagues are surprised as to why I took a sabbatical from (being) the head of the board of administration of the Indian Association of Racing and Breeding... I gave up that love and passion of mine for more of a humanitarian cause than high-profile racing... We (Serum Institute) are the lowest-priced in every product that we market not only in India but also across the globe and the result has been amazing. It seems quite likely that we can make India proud to be the number one manufacturer in terms of numbers of vaccines that children get, never in the value. The number would touch two billion doses. My team and I hope to achieve this for India,” Poonawalla stated.



Poonawalla:  
national  
recognition



## Leading clinical services

Dr Ferzaan Engineer, chief executive officer, Quintiles Research (India) Private Limited (which is a large contract research organization conducting clinical trials) received the BioServices Company of the Year 2004 award from E. Abraham



*Engineer: leading bioservices company*

Mathew, chief editor, *BioSpectrum*. Speaking at a panel discussion prior to the award presentation, Engineer said: "In the last seven years, we have been seeing increasing interest in clinical trials and a lot of international work has been coming to India. Particularly in the last

one or two years, we have seen a strategic shift (of) clinical work being moved to relatively new geographies and India is one of the most important geographies. I am concerned that our regulatory infrastructure may not catch up as quickly as one would like... we need to come up with a single window (regulatory) system which is fast, transparent, efficient and science-based, with a pace and vigor to make us globally competitive and meet expectations of public trust."

Dr Narges Mahaluxmivala is president, Clinical Development Services, Quintiles Research (India), a leader in the clinical research segment in the country, with experience in over 90 clinical studies involving more than 600 sites and 13,000 patients.



*Mahaluxmivala: growing clinical research services*

"Regulatory authorities in the US and in Europe are accepting data which have a substantial proportion from India and three trials conducted by us solely in India have been accepted by the US FDA (Food and Drug Administration) as part of a larger program... Clinical research in India is at a relatively nascent stage, but the potential for growth is enormous in all aspects," Mahaluxmivala told *BioSpectrum* which has listed Quintiles Research (India) among its Top 20 companies. Quintiles has offices in Ahmedabad, Bombay and Bangalore.

## Avesthagen tie-ups

Avestha Gengraine Technologies Private Limited (see "The lady and the lab," *Parsiana*, November 2001) announced a

strategic joint venture with the Denmark-based Centre for Clinical and Basic Research (CCBR) and its subsidiary Nordic Biosciences. Avesthagen, a premier Indian biotechnology and bioinformatics company founded by entrepreneur-scientist Villoo Morawala Patell in Bangalore around five years ago, will work with CCBR on a wide array of aspects covering the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of osteoporosis and osteoarthritis, a leading healthcare problem in rapidly aging populations, including the Parsis, in developed and developing countries.

Speaking about the tie-up, Dr Claus Christiansen, founder and chief executive officer, CCBR, said: "We are happy to tie-up with Avesthagen; this partnership will be crucial to jumpstarting the Indo-Danish collaboration in the biotech industry," reports *BioSpectrum's* December 2004 issue.

Pharma major Cipla and Avesthagen have expanded the scope of their ongoing biotherapeutics development program to include next generation drugs that cater to the oncology and cardiovascular segments. The expansion is a sequel to the successes in the ongoing program between the two companies in autoimmune disorders and oncology that was announced earlier in May 2004, reports *BioSpectrum's* January 2005 issue.

## AP's first biotech park

The first specialized biotech park in Andhra Pradesh (AP) is being developed near Hyderabad by Shapoorji Pallonji Biotech Park Private Limited (SPBP). Covering 300 acres, it is being developed as a joint venture with the AP government. The Park already has 17 companies of which six are US based Research and Development units. With the government offering several fiscal benefits, investment by companies in the two phases is expected to be in the

*Shapoorji Pallonji Biotech Park under development*

region of Rs 800 crore. Further information is available on [www.spbiotechpark.com](http://www.spbiotechpark.com)

## Outstanding Zarathushtis

While the World Zarathushti Chamber of Commerce (WZCC) has announced its "Outstanding Zarathushti" 2003 awards in the 'entrepreneur' and 'professional' categories, nominations have already been invited for the awards for the year 2004 in the same categories. Its website [www.wzcc.net](http://www.wzcc.net) mentions March 31, 2005 as the last date for receiving nominations in the prescribed format which is available on their website.

For 2003, Farrokh R. Patel of USA was the "Outstanding Zarathushti Entrepreneur," Prof (Dr) Zarin R. Turel of Bombay the "Outstanding Zarathushti Professional," and Zenobia and Zubin Tantra of USA the "Outstanding Young Zarathushti Professional/Entrepreneur." Prominent Bombay businessman Pallonji S. Mistry of Shapoorji Pallonji and Company has been recognized as "Eminent Zarathushti Businessman Worldwide," according to the reports posted on the WZCC website.

Patel began his career with Union Carbide in India and USA. In 1982, he started Pegasus Products Incorporated, a custom swimming pool liner fabrication company "where the sales in the first year alone exceeded a quarter of a million dollars. In 1992, Patel formed the Cover Company manufacturing pool safety covers. In 2003, Pegasus occupied a 40,000 sq ft professional office complex and... a 55,000 sq ft production facility." In 2000, Patel formed Breeze Corporation which sells free standing above ground swimming pool kits. Patel is also a consultant in addition to managing 30 full-time employees and 15 seasonal employees. "His community service includes outsourcing work through a work-study program for



*Patell: collaborating with Denmark*



a school for disadvantaged children," including being a member of the board, as well as fundraising, states a write-up from the WZCC. Patel has also been active in the formation of the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York and in activities of the darbe-meher.

Turel has "outstanding achievements in the field of nuclear chemistry and radio-chemistry. (She) has been a pioneer in the multidisciplinary field of neutron activation analysis as a potential tool," states WZCC. Recently retired as professor and head of nuclear chemistry, Institute of Science, Bombay, Turel is currently dean of the science faculty, HSNC Board, Bombay. Turel has published more than 175 research papers and made presentations in countries like Japan, UK, USA, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden and Brazil. Her research contributions are in areas of medicine (cancer research), environmental and agriculture studies and geology. Among the numerous accolades she has received are the All India Institute of Medical Sciences Silver Jubilee Award, the Best



*Outstanding Zarathushtis (from left) Patel with Firdosh Mehta, Zubin Tantra receiving trophy from Mehta*

### Fuelling business

Parsi entrepreneurs would be ideal partners for an oil company like Essar which is looking to set up across India more than 2,500 fuel

outlets, already popularly known and recognized as the 'Laal Pump' (Red Pump), stated Yogesh Dhawan, vice president, retail sales, Essar Oil Limited. In a presentation to the members of the WZCCI, Mumbai Chapter, at Hotel Diplomat on October 15, 2004 on the occasion of the Chapter's annual general meeting (AGM), Dhawan stated that what an entrepreneur needed was a space of 45 x 45 meters, an investment of around Rs 35 lakhs and "a burning desire to succeed." Essar on its side would impart the technical knowledge, training and expertise to help set up the fuel outlets.

Petrol pumps and gas stations had earlier been a preferred business of the Parsis in India, states a communiqué from WZCCI. In recent years, nationalization and unfavorable policies for allotment, quotas, restrictions, etc had seen a drop in the popularity of this business. With privatization making inroads and private oil companies like Reliance, Essar Oil, etc making an entry, the business is seeing a new energy, with even the PSU (public sector undertakings) shedding some of their complacency. The new age gas stations provide a host of other opportunities like convenience stores, ATM counters, Internet services and food outlets, besides auto service and repairs, adds the WZCCI. Raman Pandya, president of Essar Oil, answered questions from the audience regarding the Essar proposal.

Baniel in San Rafael, California" in 1997. He has been a licensed physical therapist in the Chicago area since 1992 and his areas of special interest are orthopedic and neurologic physical therapy. Zubin has great experience in working with patients following joint replacement in wound care and in movement disorders like Parkinson's Disease, dystonia and strokes.

Zenobia Tantra's special interest includes management of patients with soft tissue injuries and fibromyalgia. She graduated from the University of Illinois in Chicago in 1997 and completed her internship at the University of Chicago, Copley Memorial and Riverdale Medical Center where she worked with patients with acute and chronic back injuries and a variety of orthopedic cases. Zenobia was selected in 1994 in the Who's Who of students in American colleges and universities. She is also a member of the Golden Keys National Honors Society.

The WZCC also states that its Middle East chapter "has come forward to develop a WZCC Journal." The first issue is expected in February 2005 and "the team is working hard towards making it a quarterly." Initially, the WZCC will be looking for sponsors for each issue. The Journal committee is under the supervision and direction of Meher Bhesania, chapter chair, Middle East region. The WZCC also has budding chapters in Australia and Pakistan.

*Dhawan (left) being felicitated by Kersi Limathwalla*



*Turel: outstanding in nuclear chemistry*



### WZCC Iran tour

The Indian chapter of WZCC (WZCCI) is organizing a trade delegation-cum-cultural tour of Iran from May 13-30, 2005, intended as an "excellent business opportunity as well as a unique pilgrimage." The cost will be around Rs 66,000 per head, all inclusive. "The actual amount may probably be a little less, depending on the rupee rate to the dollar at that time," says WZCCI's Kersi Commissariat. WZCC members from anywhere can join the tour with their families. For details, contact kcommissariat@yahoo.com or access Upcoming Events on www.wzcc.net

Teacher of Bombay University award and the Dr M. V. Ramaniah Lifetime Achievement Award.

"They have grown their enterprise from one physical therapy clinic to four (with a fifth in the works) in just five years," states the WZCC, commending Zubin and Zenobia Tantra's professionalism and entrepreneurial spirit. Graduating from Bombay University in Physical Therapy, Zubin "became a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner from Ant



Singh and the Cottons store in Bombay

Aspi Katgara, general manager of The Zoroastrian Co-operative Bank Limited, commended the WZCCI for its efforts to promote business opportunities. Katgara invited entrepreneurs to take full advantage of credit facilities available from Zoroastrian Bank but cautioned budding businessmen to consider new projects carefully and not jump in recklessly, so that they do not put their own and lenders' funds to risk. Bombay Parsi Punchayet chief executive officer Behram Dastur mentioned that he would present to the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India the possibility of exploring the utilization of land outside Bombay owned by outstation anjumans for setting up gas stations.

The accounts of the WZCCI Mumbai chapter for the year 2003-04 had been merged with the India Chamber and there were no separate financial reports prepared during the year 2003-04 for the Mumbai chapter, treasurer Yazdi Tantra informed the members at the AGM.

## Casual and classy

"They come in to buy one, go out buying three," says Jaipur's Behroze Singh, talking about customers frequenting her recently opened shop Cottons on Chowpatty Sea Face in Bombay. "Our prices are reasonable, we give good value for money."

With emphasis on the ethnic, Cottons stocks a variety of long and short kurtas, casualwars, kurtis, dupattas, patialas, tops, crushed skirts, etc for ladies and kurtas, pyjamas, churidars for gents. While 90 percent of the thrust is on cotton, chiffon dupattas and a few items in georgette or silk are available, says Singh. "We cater for the complete look — silver jewelry, jootis,

*Emerald Isle villa at Gholvad*

match the way you like — traditional or funky, casual or chic, depends on your choice. Small embellishments like beadwork, sequins or embroidery add a touch of class, without going over the top. We are hoping to do saris in the near future," she adds.

Singh began her business (see "Cool in Cottons," *Parsiana*, August 2002) with children's clothes. "The market for children's clothing is limited and people wanted me to go into apparel for adults. We catered to a niche market in Jaipur when we opened five years ago. There were high-end boutiques or run of the mill bazaar stuff, nothing in between for the middle class. Our product, with its simple cut and good finish, appeals to the discerning shopper," she remarks.

Cottons does not use either plastic or paper bags at the delivery counter. Outfits are handed over to the customer in cloth bags made from leftover material by women in Jaipur. With a popular outlet in the Greater Kailash area in Delhi, "Cottons *ka thela* (delivery bags of Cottons) are quite well-known in Delhi," she laughs. Clients include celebrities like Rajmata Gayatri Devi of Jaipur, film stars, socialites and upcoming stars from the television world too. Garments are tailored and dispatched to the three retail stores (Jaipur, Delhi and Bombay) from their Indiawear manufacturing base in Jaipur. Managing the Bombay store is Mahrukh Irani. "She's great with cus-

tomers," commends Singh. "The response from the young as well as older people has been encouraging. We have received excellent feedback. Customers tell us that our designs are well appreciated, with acquaintances inquiring 'where have you bought this outfit from?'" observes Irani.

## Emerald enclave

"Gholvad is an ecologically fragile area, no industries are allowed and the air is pollution free," says Rohinton Batliwala who is developing a residential complex of villas and apartments known as Emerald Isle. Surrounded by orchards of chikoo, coconut, litchee and mango, the enclave is within five minutes walk of Gholvad's beach, as well as the railway station, market, etc, he notes.

With Gholvad in Thana district just three hours away from Bombay by road or rail, the independent and semi detached villas and 12 apartments are suitable as permanent residences for people after retirement or as a weekend holiday home, says Batliwala who is developing a part of his ancestral property. The villas are spacious with three bedrooms; the flats in the two-storied building are smaller and of varying sizes. The RCC (reinforced cement concrete) sloping roof is topped with mangalore tiles in keeping with the rural surroundings.

With a planned lagoon pool, landscaped common and private gardens, the complex will have common maintenance facilities for cleaning and gardening, security guards and 24 hours running water, states the Emerald Isle brochure. "A sample unit is ready. I have a full-time man there who will show you around," says Batliwala, adding that Gholvad and nearby Dahanu have several Zoroastrian families as well as an adarian at Bordi. The project's website is [www.emeraldislegholvad.com](http://www.emeraldislegholvad.com)

Compiled by Hilla P. Guzder



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