

Beximco launches copy of blockbuster hepatitis C drug

Incepta was the first to launch the medicine in February

STAR BUSINESS DESK

BEXIMCO Pharma yesterday announced the launch of the generic version of the wonder drug Sofosbuvir for treating hepatitis C under the brand name Sofovir C. Sofosbuvir is a revolutionary drug recently launched by Gilead Sciences Inc, under its brand Sovaldi, which is considered to be the most effective medication to treat hepatitis C with a cure rate of 90 percent.

The drug costs \$1,000 (around Tk 78,000) per tablet in the developed market, making it one of the most expensive medicines in the world.

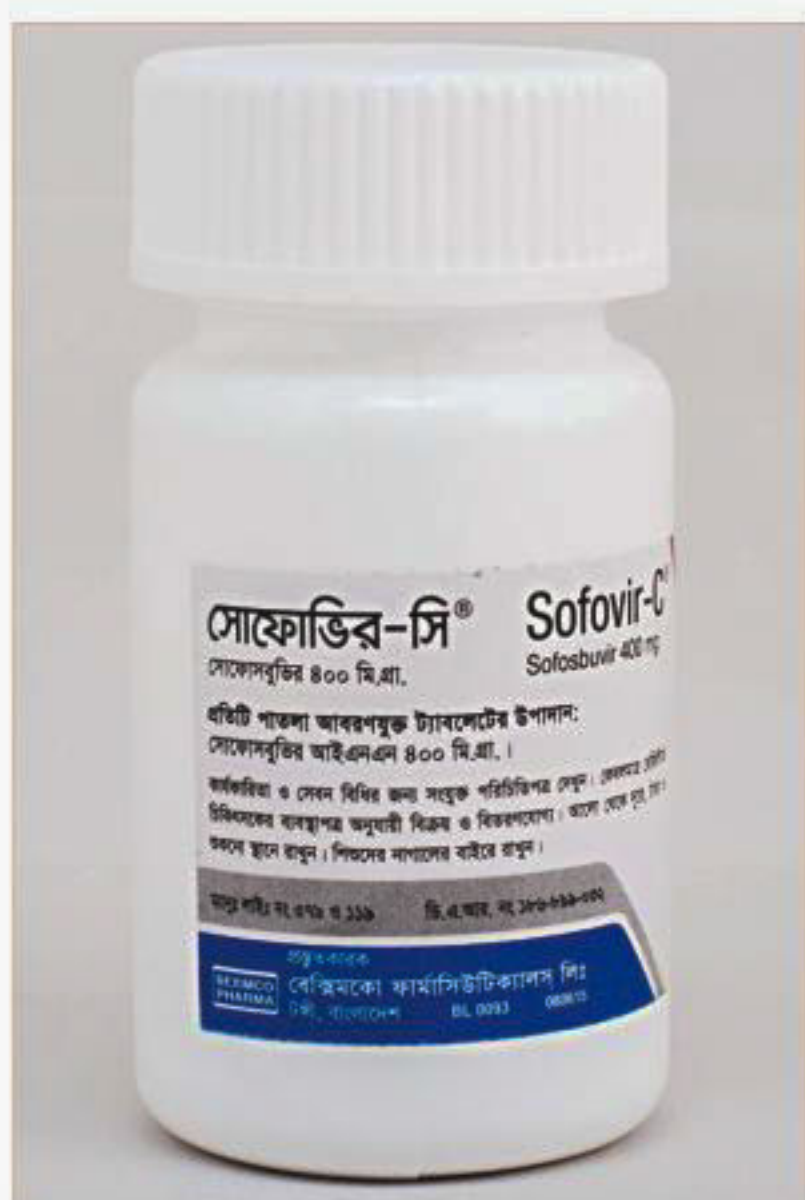
But a tablet will cost Tk 600 in Bangladesh, and the total cost of the therapy would be Tk 50,400 for a 12-week course compared to the whopping Tk 67 lakh in developed countries, Beximco said in a statement.

"We are proud to have played a role in introducing this breakthrough therapy at a price which is currently the lowest in the world," Nazmul Hassan, managing director of Beximco Pharma, said.

"As the local drug is the world's cheapest, we will make sure that it is not smuggled out of Bangladesh. That's why it's a prescription-only medicine," said Shawkat Haider, general manager of business development at Beximco Pharma.

"The drug will be distributed through our own distribution channel and will not be available in retail outlets."

The medicine was first launched in Bangladesh in February by local



drugmaker, Incepta Pharmaceuticals.

The generic drugmaker has beaten to the market a number of larger Indian competitors that were licensed by Gilead to produce low-cost versions of Sovaldi for 91 countries that are mostly poor.

Nations not covered by Gilead's licence, including Thailand, Malaysia and Morocco, and countries where Sovaldi is not patented could benefit from the new source of cheap copies.

Incepta also sells the drug at Tk 600 per tablet and it is not available in retail outlets.

Gilead is "aware of unauthorised generic versions of Sofosbuvir being offered in the marketplace," Bloomberg News quoted Gilead as saying in a report in March.

"We're focused on enabling our 11 Indian generic partners to launch their authorised generic versions as soon as possible," Gilead said at the time.

Hyderabad-based Natco Pharma Ltd, one of Gilead's licensees, launched its generic Sofosbuvir in Nepal in March. Natco had priced its generic medicine at 19,900 rupees (\$318) for a bottle of 28 tablets in Nepal.

Gilead's hepatitis drugs, including Sovaldi and the related pill Harvoni which combines Sovaldi with another drug, have transformed the way liver infection is treated, with most patients being cured after a 12-week course.

Nearly a dozen Indian manufacturers are part of Gilead's licensing pact for low-income countries, including Cipla Ltd, Hetero Labs Ltd, Mylan Laboratories Ltd, Ranbaxy Laboratories Ltd and Natco.

Sovaldi was Gilead's top-selling product last year, bringing in \$10.3 billion in sales for the Foster City, California-based company.

The US Food and Drug Administration has recently given its approval to Beximco Pharma after inspecting the oral solid dosage facilities of the company.

In Bangladesh, hepatitis C emerges as a major health problem with nearly two million patients estimated to be infected with this virus, Beximco said in the statement.

Globally, it is estimated that 170-185 million people, about 3 percent of the world's population, are chronically infected with hepatitis C virus.

Brazil, China, India, South Africa in push for climate financing

AFP, New York

BRAZIL, China, India and South Africa voiced disappointment Sunday over the failure of rich countries to come up with billions of dollars needed to help them sign on to a landmark climate change deal.

Ministers and top negotiators from the four key countries met in New York to close talks on the climate deal head into crucial months before a Paris conference in December.

In a joint statement, they expressed "disappointment over the continued lack of any clear roadmap for developed countries to provide \$100 billion per year by 2020, as well as on substantially scaling up financial support after 2020."

The world's developed countries agreed in 2010 to mobilize \$100 billion a year by 2020 to help poorer nations adapt to the impacts of climate change and reduce their emissions.

Those commitments have fallen short by about \$70 billion, according to the World Bank.

"There is still a clear expectation and so I hope the developing countries can fulfill their commitment before the Paris meeting," China's envoy for climate change Xie Zhenhua told reporters.

World governments will try to forge a new global deal to address climate change at a UN climate conference in December, with both developed and developing countries committing to cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Financing to help developing nations cut emissions and adapt to climate change remains a key issue.

South Africa's Environment Minister Edna Molewa stressed that "the four countries sitting around this table have been, on our own, doing a



Environmental activists display a banner calling for action on climate change as they arrive on St Peter's square prior to Pope Francis's Sunday Angelus prayer at the Vatican.

lot of work" on climate change. "It is important that this scaling up happens," she said. "Adaptation requires a lot of money."

India's chief negotiator Ravi Prasad emphasized the need for developed countries to share emissions-cutting and clean-energy technology with poor nations to bring them onboard the global effort to address climate change.

"Without the concomitant flow of technology support, for many developing countries and poor economies, it will be impossible to move on to any such trajectory in the near future," said Prasad.

While pressing demands for climate financing, the four countries stressed that they will be working closely together in the months ahead to help clinch a deal in Paris that

they said was urgently needed.

Brazil's Environment Minister Izabella Teixeira said the four countries were committed to work hard to avoid a repeat of the 2009 Copenhagen climate conference that ended in failure.

"We cannot postpone this agenda, this agreement," said Teixeira.

China's Xie said negotiations were achieving progress.

"We are eliminating differences. We are very positive and very hopeful for the success of the Paris meeting," he said.

China, the world's biggest greenhouse gas emitter, has joined forces with India, the third largest emitter, along with Brazil, which ranks among the top 10 and South Africa, which boasts the continent's most developed economy.



Hyun Chil Hong, right, president and chief executive of Samsung India Electronics, and Bollywood actress Huma Qureshi hold the Samsung's new Z1 smartphones at its launch in New Delhi. Samsung Electronics plans to launch more handsets running on its own Tizen operating system later this year.

Thailand launches Muslim-friendly tourist app

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thailand on Monday launched a smartphone app to attract Muslim visitors, something that could help further boost an industry which has been steadily recovering since a 2014 coup.

Thailand is predominantly Buddhist but parts of the south are majority Muslim. Known for its laissez-faire attitude towards travellers, powder-white beaches and as an aviation hub, Thailand draws millions of tourists each year.

Now its tourism body hopes the new app will help further boost Thailand's tourism sector, which makes up about 10 percent of its economy.

The industry took a beating last year as some foreign governments issued warnings against non-essential travel to Thailand due to political unrest and a May 22 coup, but it has been steadily recovering.

Efforts to welcome Muslim travellers to Thailand come amid rising anti-Muslim sentiment in some Western countries and recent Islamist militant attacks.

The new app will be available on Google Inc's Android and Apple Inc's iOS systems, the Tourism Authority of Thailand said in a statement.

With search and navigation features, it will help visitors find hotels and shopping centres with prayer rooms and halal, or permissible under Islamic law, restaurants, said Juthaporn Rerngronasa, acting governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand.

Among non-Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries, Thailand was ranked the second most popular place for Muslim travellers to visit in the world after Singapore by the Global Muslim Travel Index in 2015.

Indian pharma's struggle to tighten standards paves way for M&A deals



Pharmacists dispense free medication, provided by the government, to patients at Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital in Chennai, India.

REUTERS, Mumbai

INDIA'S smaller generic drugmakers, struggling to cope with a bruised reputation and tougher regulation in the United States, are under pressure to consider branching out to new, less-profitable markets or sell out to larger rivals.

Two years after its most high-profile regulatory setback to date in the United States - Ranbaxy's \$500 million US fine for drug safety violations - India's \$15 billion a year generic drug industry is still rebuilding its image in its biggest market.

Many of its top firms are facing sanctions at some of their factories, as the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) tightens checks and its approvals process. Combined with government-mandated price controls on drugs at home, that is piling pressure on smaller players.

"If they want to have a presence globally, they have to make investments. If they can't, then they'll have to focus on other markets or scale back their ambition outside of India, and that's probably what will happen," said Subhanu Saxena, CEO of Cipla, India's fourth-largest drugmaker by revenue.

Ashok Anand, president of Hikal Ltd, a Mumbai-based drugmaker with a market value of \$167 million, said some peers were putting themselves on the block.

"If they cannot deal with the stricter regulations, they might just prefer to sell out," he said.

Pressure on US sales has been felt across the Indian industry, with all drugmakers hit by delays in FDA approvals as the US safety body overhauls its review process. Growth in US revenue for drugmakers slowed to 14 percent in the year to March 2015, less than half what it was in the year to March 2012, according to brokerage Edelweiss.

But for larger players who want to plug gaps or, for the likes of Glenmark and Aurobindo who aim to grow in the United States, this pressure has lowered prices and could pave the way for attractive deals, bankers said.

"Now that some of the smaller companies are reeling under intensive regulatory scrutiny and want to cash out on their investments, valuations would be much more realistic," said the head of India M&A at a large European bank in Mumbai. Indian manufacturers say they

have spent millions in high-end testing equipment, improved training and have hired larger teams in quality control since Ranbaxy was fined for manipulating clinical data.

Some consultants estimate spending on compliance has more than doubled to reach about 6 to 7 percent of sales for the larger companies.

But while the number of US export bans issued to Indian companies fell to eight in 2014 from 21 in 2013, according to FDA data, the agency continues to find manufacturing violations at the plants of some of the biggest drugmakers in the country, an indication of the pervasiveness of the problem.

Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, Wockhardt, Dr Reddy's Laboratories and Cadila Healthcare have all faced FDA rebukes over the past year.

Smaller firms Ipca and Aarti Drugs faced FDA bans on their plants this year. These failures - which executives blame on India's "quick fix" culture and consultants blame on a failure to prioritise compliance - have clouded short-term growth prospects and added to pressure on smaller players, pushing some to look elsewhere.

Amazon to offer loans to sellers in China, 7 other countries

REUTERS, Chicago

Amazon.com Inc will launch its business loan program for small sellers later this year in eight more countries including China, where credit is becoming a key factor in competing for new vendors and grabbing market share.

Until now, the e-retailer has offered the service only in the United States and Japan. Amazon Lending, founded in 2012, now plans to offer short-term working capital loans in other countries where it operates a third-party, seller-run marketplace business, the head of Amazon Marketplace, Peter Faricy, told Reuters.

The countries are Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom.

The service is on an invite-only basis and is not open to all sellers on Amazon's platform.

Other large retailers including eBay Inc's PayPal and Alibaba Group Holdings, which run third-party marketplaces, are also turning to credit to boost their vendor base.

Some lending industry officials who help lenders assess credit risk say these retailers are taking on risky loans because they don't know the shape of the credit market in which the sellers are operating.

Small businesses have high failure rates, especially in China and India, added William Black, a former US banking regulator and professor of Economics and Law at the University of Missouri. Amazon said it can safely offer loans

based on internal data and because it takes loan payments out of the sales proceeds it pays sellers.

PayPal spokesman Josh Criscoe said eBay merchants who use PayPal are eligible for the working capital loans and credit is offered to only those customers that have a strong PayPal sales history. PayPal has provided more than \$500 million in capital since September 2013, with an average loan disbursement of \$2 million per day.

A spokeswoman for Alibaba's financial services arm Ant Financial, which offers these loans, said credit is offered to Taobao, Tmall merchants and other small business owners who meet certain conditions. The company also offers such loans to customers in some countries like the United States and Britain.

Since 2011, Ant Financial's Ant Micro Loan programme has issued 400 billion yuan (\$64.42 billion) worth of loans, and the non-performing loan ratio is 1.5 percent, the spokeswoman added.

Amazon offers three- to six-month loans of \$1,000 to \$600,000 to help merchants buy inventory. It makes money on interest and takes a cut of all sales on its marketplace, which now account for about 40 percent of total Amazon site sales.

Amazon said it has offered hundreds of millions of dollars in loans since 2012, with more than half of its sellers opting for a repeat loan. The company declined to provide specific figures and also did not say how much it plans to lend this year.