

Scheme to inject innovation into pharma industry

Major drug-makers to join forces to develop new technologies

Annabeth Leow

A new scheme unveiled yesterday is primed to give drug-makers and the wider manufacturing sector a shot in the arm as disruptive change roils industries and poses huge challenges to bosses.

The initiative centres on bringing pharmaceutical giants together to jointly develop new technologies and enhance productivity.

Biomedical manufacturing is a key contributor to the overall manufacturing sector, which last year accounted for one-fifth of the country's gross domestic product.

Minister for Trade and Industry (Industry) S. Iswaran said yesterday that the Pharma Innovation Programme Singapore (Pips) "will bring together Singapore's public-sector research capabilities and the domain expertise of key players in the pharma industry to improve and transform the manufacturing operations and technologies of the industry".

It is spearheaded by the Agency for Science, Technology and Re-

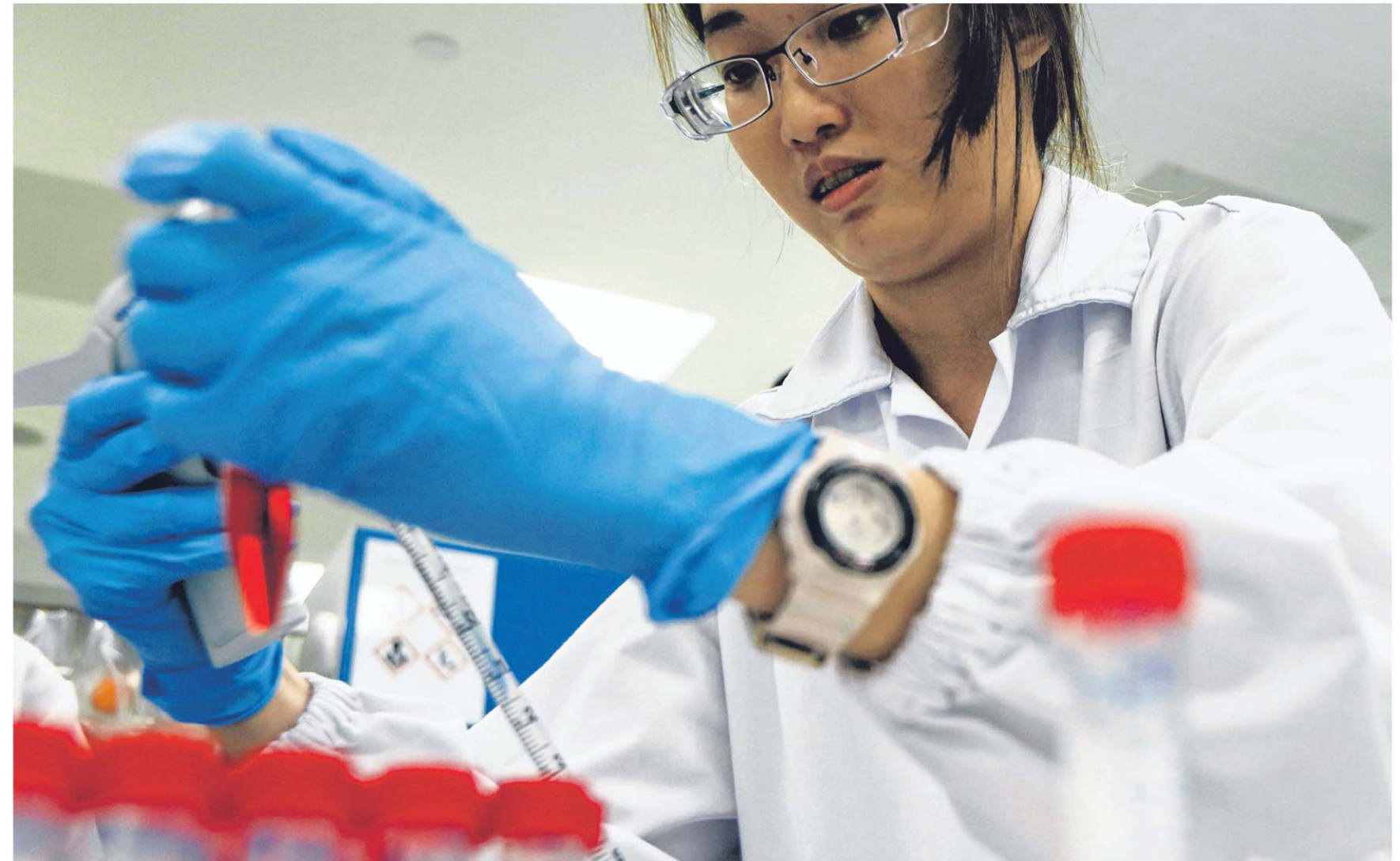
search (A*Star), in partnership with the National University of Singapore (NUS). They yesterday announced a deal to bring on board leading multinationals Glaxo-SmithKline (GSK), MSD International and Pfizer Asia-Pacific.

Pips involves developing continuous manufacturing to improve active pharmaceutical ingredients and exploring bio-catalysis technologies to make high-value complex chemicals more sustainably. The various partners will also consider high-tech options to enhance operations and raise productivity – for example, data analytics and automated supply chains.

Mr Iswaran said: "Given the complex and dynamic nature of the future of manufacturing, it is important for us to strengthen the partnerships within the local manufacturing ecosystem in order to pool resources, share risk and increase adoption rates."

His Pips announcement kicked off the Future of Manufacturing Summit @ Singapore, the anchor event of A*Star's two-week series on developing and sustaining Singapore's industry capabilities.

A*Star chairman Lim Chuan Poh told the summit: "A*Star will continue to partner leading industry players to anchor high value-added



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MINISTER FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY (INDUSTRY) S. ISWARAN

manufacturing, adopt advanced manufacturing technologies and equip our people with the requisite skill sets."

Mr Lim cited the rise of personalised healthcare and the need to produce increasingly targeted medicine as a technical challenge and growth opportunity. "The production of these bespoke medicines requires a manufacturing process that is much more flexible and quick to respond to demands," he said.

Mr John Smith, managing director of MSD International (Singapore branch), told *The Straits Times* that Pips will help Singapore avoid becoming "a victim of emerg-

ing trends and emerging technologies" in pharmaceutical manufacturing, as drugs become more complex and harder to make amid squeezed margins.

"We are seeing a move to high-value, low-volume products versus high-volume products, so we've got to change our production methodologies to meet that," he said.

He added that, as part of the agreement, his firm could share non-competitive research findings not just with A*Star and NUS but also with the other big players involved.

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PHOTO: REUTERS