

CSL Limited announces tender offer to acquire Vifor Pharma Ltd

Global biotechnology leader CSL Limited and Vifor Pharma Ltd, a global specialty pharmaceutical company with leadership in iron deficiency, nephrology & cardio-renal therapies, today announced that they have entered into a definitive agreement for CSL to acquire Vifor Pharma for an aggregate equity value for Vifor Pharma of US\$ 11.7 / CHF 10.9 billion.

CSL has offered to acquire Vifor Pharma in an all-cash tender offer of US\$179.25 (CHF 167) per share, payable in U.S. dollars. 1 The offer assumes

a dividend of CHF 2 expected to be declared at the AGM of 26 April, consistent with past practice.

The tender offer represents an implied premium of approximately 61% to the unaffected closing price of Vifor Pharma on 1 December 2021 and a 47% premium to Vifor Pharma's unaffected 1-month VWAP as of 1 December 2021. 2

Patinex AG, Vifor Pharma's largest shareholder holding 23.2% has agreed to tender its shares into the offer. The Transaction remains subject to the

conditions and further terms including: Minimum acceptance rate of 80% of all Vifor Pharma shares on a fully diluted basis; and further customary offer conditions, including regulatory approvals. The tender is currently expected to commence around 18 January 2022 and the transaction is expected to complete around mid-2022.

The Board of Directors of Vifor Pharma considers that the proposed transaction respects the interests of all stakeholders and is unanimously recommending the offer to shareholders. There is committed

financing for the deal and a strong commitment to pursue regulatory clearances.

"Vifor Pharma's strategy has been to focus towards continuing being a market leader in iron deficiency, nephrology and cardio-renal therapies." Jacques Theurillat, Chairman of the Board of Directors Vifor Pharma Group commented. "The offer provides an excellent strategic opportunity for Vifor Pharma to optimize future market opportunities from a position of strength and to create substantial value for all stakeholders."

The transaction will enable Vifor Pharma to leverage CSL's global reach, balance sheet and capabilities to bring more products to patients within its key categories. The transaction also enables Vifor Pharma to accelerate growth in cardiovascular-metabolic, renal and transplant.

Centerview Partners UK LLP is acting as exclusive financial advisor to Vifor Pharma on the transaction. IFBC have been retained as Fairness Opinion providers by the Vifor Pharma Board of Directors. (Agencies)

Virus is also hitting more federal air traffic controllers

Wave of canceled flights from omicron closes out 2021

By David Koenig

More canceled flights frustrated air travelers on the final day of 2021 and appeared all but certain to inconvenience hundreds of thousands more over the New Year's holiday weekend. Airlines blamed many of the cancellations on crew shortages related to the spike in COVID-19 infections, along with wintry weather in parts of the United States.

United Airlines, which suffered the most cancellations among the biggest US carriers, agreed to pay pilot bonuses to fix a staffing shortage.

By early evening Friday on the East Coast, airlines had scrubbed more than 1,550 US flights - about 6% of all scheduled flights - and roughly 3,500 worldwide, according to tracking service FlightAware.

That pushed the total US cancellations since Christmas Eve to more than 10,000 and topped the previous single-day peak this holiday season, which was 1,520 on Dec. 26.

The disruptions come just as travel numbers climb higher going into the New Year's holiday weekend. Since Dec. 16, more than 2 million travelers a day on average have passed through US airport security checkpoints, an increase of nearly 100,000 a day since November and nearly double last December.

Led by Southwest and United, airlines have already canceled 1,500 US flights on Saturday - about 700 at Chicago's O'Hare Airport, where the forecast called for a winter storm - and 700 more on Sunday.

Canceled flights began rising from a couple hundred a day shortly before Christmas, most notably for United Airlines, Delta Air Lines and JetBlue Airways.

On Friday, United canceled more than 200 flights, or 11% of its schedule - and that did not include cancellations on the United Express regional affiliate. CommutAir, which operates many United Express flights, scrubbed one-third of its schedule, according to FlightAware.

United decided to spend more money to fill empty cockpits. The airline reached a deal with the pilots' union to pay 3.5 times normal wages to pilots who pick up extra trips through Monday and triple pay for flights between Tuesday and Jan. 29, according to a memo from Bryan Quigley, United's senior vice president for flight operations.

JetBlue canceled more than 140 flights, or 14% of its schedule, and Delta grounded more than 100, or 5% of its flights by midday Friday. Allegiant, Alaska, Spirit and regional carriers SkyWest and Mesa all scrubbed at least 9% of their flights.

FlightAware reported fewer cancellations at Southwest, 3%, and American, 2%.

The virus is also hitting more federal air traffic controllers. The Federal Aviation Administration said that more of its employees have tested positive - it didn't provide numbers Friday - which could lead controllers to reduce flight volumes and "might result in delays during busy periods."

While leisure travel within the US has returned to roughly pre-pandemic levels, international travel remains depressed, and the government is giving travelers new one cause to reconsider trips abroad. On Thursday, the State Department warned Americans that if they test positive for coronavirus while in a foreign country it could mean a costly quarantine until they test negative.

Since March 2020, US airlines have received \$54 billion in federal relief to keep employees on the payroll through the pandemic. Congress barred the airlines from furloughing workers but allowed them to offer incentives to quit or take long leaves of absence - and many did. The airlines have about 9% fewer workers than they had two years ago.

Kurt Ebenhoch, a former airline spokesman and later a travel-consumer advocate, said airlines added flights aggressively, cut staff too thinly, and overestimated the number of employees who would return to work after leaves of absence. It was all done, he said, "in the pursuit of profit ... and their customers paid for it, big time."

Many airlines are now rushing to hire pilots, flight attendants and other workers. In the meantime, some are trimming schedules that they can no longer operate. Southwest did that before the holidays, JetBlue is cutting flights until mid-January, and Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific is suspending cargo flights and reducing passenger flights because it doesn't have enough pilots.

Other forms of transportation are also being hammered by the surge in virus cases. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Thursday that it is monitoring more than 90 cruise ships because of COVID-19 outbreaks. The health agency warned people not to go on cruises, even if they are fully vaccinated against the virus.

The remnants of the delta variant and the rise of the new omicron variant pushed the seven-day rolling average of new daily COVID-19 cases in the US above 350,000, nearly triple the rate of just two weeks ago, according to figures from Johns Hopkins University. (AP)



Passengers line up at the TSA security checkpoint at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, Wednesday, Dec 29, 2021, in Arlington, Virginia. Winter weather and crew members infected with COVID-19 have forced airlines to spike thousands of US flights over the past week, complicating travel plans for many people during the busy holiday season. It's not clear when travel will return to normal, but airlines say a recent move by US public health officials should help get workers back sooner. (AP)

Chinese factory activity 'edges up' in December

Supply disruptions ease, export demand weakens

BEIJING, Jan 2, (AP): Chinese factory activity edged higher in December as supply disruptions eased and export demand weakened, a survey showed Friday.

The monthly purchasing managers' index issued by the national statistics agency and an industry group gained to 50.3 from November's 50.1 on a 100-point scale on which numbers above 50 show activity accelerating.

Chinese manufacturing has been hampered by shortages of some components including semiconductors and disruptions in shipping. Some areas ordered factories to shut down temporarily starting in September to meet official energy efficiency targets.

A measure of new orders improved to 49.7 from November's 49.4, according to the China Federation of Logistics & Purchasing



Employees work on the production line assembling diagnostic kits for SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19) at a pharmaceutical factory in Nantong in eastern China's Jiangsu province Wednesday, Dec 29, 2021. Chinese factory activity edged higher in December as supply disruptions eased and export demand weakened, a survey showed Friday. (AP)

and the National Bureau of Statistics, though demand still was weak. An index of export orders sank to 48.1 from 48.5.

"The overall recovery of China's economy is clearer," economist Zhang Liqun said in a statement

issued by the federation. However, he said, the country needs to "enhance the overall effect of the policy of expanding domestic demand" and get industrial supplies flowing smoothly.

'Strong euro makes EU stronger in geo-political decision-making'

BRUSSELS, Jan 1, (KUNA): The President of the European Council, Charles Michel said on Saturday the euro was a bedrock of stability and it has anchored itself on the international stage.

"A strong international euro gives us more latitude in our geopolitical decision-making, and it also offers greater access to international financial markets," he said in a statement today to mark the 20th anniversary of the euro.

"The euro isn't just a success within our EU borders. It has also anchored itself on the international stage. And

despite the crises, the euro has proven to be resilient - a symbol of European unity and stability, and never has that been truer than during COVID-19".

"The euro is our money, our European currency, and it is a concrete symbol of success that our citizens carry, every day, in 19 out of 27 member states, and in the pockets of nearly 350 million citizens," he said.

"Strengthening the Economic and Monetary Union will make the euro an even more attractive international currency," said Michel.

Meanwhile, the 19-member Euro group in a press release said twenty

years ago today, around 300 million Europeans held a brand new currency in their hands, the euro.

From Lisbon to Helsinki to Athens, citizens were able to withdraw euro banknotes in their local ATMs, buy their groceries with euro coins and travel abroad without exchanging currency, it said in a press release.

The changeover from 12 national currencies to the euro was one of a kind operation in history: the European Central Bank printed more than 15 billion euro banknotes and some 52 billion coins were minted ahead of January first, 2002, it noted.

ECB plans to redesign the banknotes

Europe's shared notes & coins mark 20th 'versary

FRANKFURT, Germany, Dec 2, (AP): The European Central Bank is celebrating the 20th anniversary of euro notes and coins as member countries wrestle with the pandemic's impact on the economy and the European Union forges a new level of financial cooperation to help boost the recovery.

The event was being marked at midnight New Year's Eve with a light display in blue and yellow, the colors of the EU, projected on its skyscraper headquarters in Frankfurt, Germany.

The introduction of notes and coins in 12 countries on Jan. 1, 2002, was a massive logistical undertaking that followed up on the introduction of the euro for accounting purposes and electronic payments three years earlier, on Jan. 1, 1999. Today, the euro is used in 19 of 27 EU countries.

The cash introduction saw the new euro notes and coins quickly replace German marks, French francs and Italian lire in ATMs, cash registers, and wallets and purses. Shop customers who paid in the old currencies received change in euros under fixed exchange rates. That swept the old currencies out of circulation as people spent their remaining national cash.

Warnings of a logistical catastrophe did not come true. ECB President Christine Lagarde - in 2002 an attorney with a global law firm - recalled withdrawing her first euros from a cash machine near her home in Normandy with friends who predicted the switch would overload the machines. "We made a bet: if the machine gave us French francs instead of euro notes, they could keep the

money," she wrote on the ECB's website. "After midnight, we tried the cash machine. It dispensed brand new crisp euro banknotes, and we all raised a glass to the new European currency."

The bank plans to redesign the banknotes, with a final decision on the new look expected in 2024. The original designs with generic windows, doors and bridges from various eras that don't represent any specific place or monument have undergone one relatively minor update since introduction. The bank is also studying a possible digital version of the currency.

The euro has been through its ups and downs since its launch as a major project of European integration. The currency union faced speculation it would break up during an extended crisis over government and bank debt in 2011-2015. European Central Bank head Mario Draghi helped end market turbulence with his July 26, 2012, promise to "do whatever it takes" to preserve the euro, followed by the ECB's offer to purchase the government debt of countries facing excessive borrowing costs.

Under Lagarde, the central bank deployed a 1.85 trillion euro (\$2.1 trillion) bond purchase program aimed at keeping borrowing costs down for companies so they can get through the worst of the pandemic.

In response to the pandemic, European Union governments have taken a further step toward economic and financial integration by agreeing to borrow money together for the 807 billion euro Next Generation EU recovery fund.



A light installation is projected onto the building of the European Central Bank during a rehearsal in Frankfurt, Germany, Thursday, Dec 30, 2021. (AP)