

Weekly Current Affairs update

For the Week March 13 to 19, 2011

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Section A: INDIA

Delhi to get Category I UNESCO institute

The Union Cabinet on March 15, 2011 approved the establishment of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development as a Category I Institute of UNESCO in New Delhi. The proposal to set up the institute was recommended by the UNESCO Executive Board, at its 182nd session held in September 2009 and approved by 35th Session of General Conference of UNESCO in October 2009. The mission of the institute will be to strengthen educational and knowledge base for promoting education for peace and sustainable development and contribute to related research and capacity building needs of member States with focus on Asia and the Pacific region.

It will put India in the category of select countries with a Category I Institute of UNESCO. Currently there are 11 Category I Institutes of UNESCO in the world. Nine are located in the developed countries and two in developing countries, namely, Ethiopia and Venezuela. Further it will serve as a platform for India to emerge as a global leader from the Asia-Pacific region in the areas of education for peace and sustainable development.

The institute will be managed through an operational agreement between UNESCO and India. It will be administered by a 12-member Governing Board to approve programme and budget of the institute and give policy directions. The Board shall be assisted by a four- member Executive Committee including the chairperson. The estimated expenditure for setting up this Institute will be Rs.223.68 crore over a period of seven years.

Committee on autonomy for central educational institutions submits report

A high-power committee has called for sweeping changes in the higher education system. The committee constituted to 'evolve a comprehensive policy for autonomy of central educational institutions' (CEIs) has recommended that the legislative framework under which these universities were established be uniformly revised and brought under a common Act.'

The committee was headed by N.R. Madhava Menon committee submitted its report to Human Resource Development Minister Kapil Sibal in March 2011. The other members were Professors Seyed E. Hasnain, Pankaj Chandra, M.S. Ananth, Mihir Choudhary and Ved Prakash. Its major recommendations include:

Status of Visitor: The office of the Visitor for central universities should be done away with and the powers transferred to the Chancellor. The President is the Visitor for all the central universities.

IIMs: Indian Institutes of Management should be allowed to grant degrees to make them more autonomous. At present, the IIMs award only diplomas in management courses.

Bureaucratic appointments: The practice of appointing civil service officials to university positions should be avoided. The central educational institutes should create a pool of education-administrators endowed with expertise in managing educational and research institutions

Univ. status for better colleges: Established colleges with a good track record should be elevated universities in a phased manner, giving them time to organise themselves for the new challenge. The system of affiliation (of colleges to universities) has let down academic standards in both affiliated and affiliating universities.

Freedom to appoint faculty: Central Educational Institutions should be permitted to hire eminent faculty from anywhere irrespective of the citizenship of the candidate, and decide on the fees to be charged and scholarships to be granted.

Awarding doctorates: The CEIs should be free to invite distinguished citizens from any part of the world to receive an honorary doctorate after approval from their Academic and Executive Councils.

Managing finances: The institutions should be given greater flexibility in managing their finances, and the annual grant revised every year based on their academic and financial performance, even as they have the freedom to raise alternative funding, both internally and externally, subject to the general financial rules.

Periodic review: All Central universities must undergo a comprehensive review of their functioning once in 10 years by an External Peer Review Board (EPRB), to be constituted by the HRD Ministry from a large panel comprising eminent educationists, scientists, public figures and stalwarts from industry, living in India or abroad.

Wikileaks reveals “pay-offs” in July 2008

confidence vote: An aide of Congress leader Satish Sharma allegedly showed a US Embassy employee “two chests containing cash” and said Rs 50-60 crore is ready for use as “pay-offs” to win the support of some MPs ahead of crucial vote of confidence in UPA government over the Indo-US nuclear deal in July 2008, claimed a set of US diplomatic cables released by Wikileaks on March 17, 2011. The UPA Government won the confidence vote in the Lok Sabha with 275 votes for and 256 votes against. Noting that the Congress party machine was working “overtime” behind the scenes in the run-up to the confidence vote on July 22, 2008, the cables also claimed the party had allegedly paid Rs 10 crores to each of the four MPs of Ajit Singh's Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) for getting them to vote in its favour. Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, on March 18 rejected allegations that MPs were bribed to win the trust vote and termed the charges as “speculative, unverified and unverifiable”.

Shillong Declaration calls for widening of RTI Act:

The third National Convention on the Right to Information (RTI) Act concluded in Shillong on March 12, 2011. The Convention came out with a 12-point Shillong Declaration which called for bringing all political parties, public-private partnership (PPP) entities, trade unions and non-governmental organisations under the purview of the RTI Act. The Declaration also stated that exemptions given under Section 24 to security and intelligence agencies need to be removed. It also included a resolution calling for transparency in the functioning of religious institutions and the use of public money for religious purposes. The convention demanded formation of an anti-corruption authority like the Lokpal/Lokayukt to ensure that information accessed through the RTI that exposes corruption is acted upon and that the guilty are held accountable. The Shillong Declaration further stated that it is the moral responsibility of the government to ensure protection of RTI activists and users.

Govt to screen all above 30 for diabetes, hypertension: Starting in 2011-12, the central government is planning to screen the entire population above 30 years

of age for non-communicable illnesses such as diabetes and hypertension in five years. The project will be rolled out in 100 districts of the country during 2011-12. All pregnant women, irrespective of age, will also be part of this exercise. The ambitious plan is part of a national disease prevention programme being worked out, said Union health minister Ghulam Nabi Azad at the ‘Partners for Health in Southeast Asia’ meeting organized by the World Health Organisation in New Delhi from March 16-18, 2011. The three-day conference, attended by delegates from 11 Southeast Asian countries, aimed to build collaboration on healthcare partnerships.

Committee submits report on Devas S-band deal:

The high power review committee tasked by the government to review the controversial agreement between Antrix Corporation and Devas Multimedia Private Ltd submitted its report to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on March 12, 2011. The committee, consisting of the former Cabinet Secretary, B.K. Chaturvedi, and Professor Roddam Narasimha, was asked to go into all aspects of the satellite deal in which the private company was given virtually exclusive rights to S-band spectrum. The committee's mandate included suggesting correctives and improvements and changes in the processes and procedures followed by Antrix, ISRO and the Department of Space and fixing responsibility for lapses, if any. The Antrix-Devas deal was scrapped in February 2011 following a decision of the Cabinet Committee on Security.

Health Ministry, MCI oppose foreign varsity Bill:

The Health Ministry and the Medical Council of India (MCI) have told the Parliamentary Standing Committee examining the Foreign Universities Bill that opening up medical education to foreign players could hurt the Indian medical sector, drain faculty resources, and raise quality concerns. The Foreign Educational Institutions (Regulation of Entry and Operation) Bill, 2010, proposes to open up the higher education sector to foreign universities. Health Ministry and MCI officials, who deposed before the HRD related Parliamentary Panel headed by Oscar Fernandes in March 2011, pointed out that there was already a huge faculty shortage across medical colleges in India – estimated at 3,000-4,000 vacancies. Opening up medical education to foreign players at this juncture would mean that more of the existing faculty, lured by better pay packages and incentives, could move to foreign institutes thereby further deepening the crisis. The Foreign Universities legislation also does not provide for the MCI's scrutiny on foreign institutes offering medical education in India. This could also lead to ethical issues and quality concerns.

Karnataka to pioneer tele-filing of RTI petitions:

Karnataka is all set to open a business process outsourcing (BPO) centre - the first of its kind in the country — exclusively for filing petitions under the Right to Information Act. Citizens need to call up the centre, expected to be located in Bangalore, to file RTI applications, in lieu of some charges. Called as 'Mahiti' (means information in Kannada), the project will be launched in June. Karnataka receives RTI filings of 60,000 to 65,000 every year.

Fencing along Indo-Bangladesh and Indo-Pak Borders continues:

Out of the sanctioned fencing of 3436 km along Indo-Bangladesh border, approximately, 2435 km of fencing has been completed. Similarly, along Indo-Pak border 1926 km of fencing has been completed against the sanctioned stretch of 2044 km. Due to various constraints like delay in land acquisition, erection of fencing within 150 yards of international border, statutory clearances under Wild Life and Forest Act, public protest and factors like inundation of water in alignment of fencing in Gujarat, the project works have been affected. The scheduled date for completion of the fencing projects is March, 2012. This was stated by the Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Mullappally Ramachandran in Rajya Sabha on March 16, 2011.

No proposal to amend Article 72 on mercy petition:

Suggestions have been received for amending the article 72 of the Constitution of India to fix a time limit for consideration of mercy petition of convicts facing capital punishment. However, at present, there is no proposal to amend article 72 of the Constitution of India. This was stated by the Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Mullappally Ramachandran in Rajya Sabha on March 16, 2011.

UPSC, Canada PSC sign MoU to promote Best Practices:

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and the Public Service Commission of Canada in New Delhi on March 15, 2011 regarding cooperation to promote best practices. The MoU will facilitate sharing and promoting best practices through bilateral exchanges. The areas of cooperation include sharing of experiences and expertise in civil services matters such as recruitment and selection, exchange of senior officials on the basis of reciprocity and mutual benefit. The MoU will remain effective for a period of three years.

Anti-sealing Bill passed in Lok Sabha: Giving interim relief to Delhi residents, the Lok Sabha on March 18, 2011

gave its approval to a Bill preventing sealing of unauthorised commercial constructions in the city. The moratorium under the National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provision) Bill will be extended for a year till December 31, 2011. The anti-sealing laws shall be deemed to have come into effect from January 1, 2011 after its enactment in parliament.

CAG unveils report on Hasan Ali Khan's wealth:

Income of Pune-based stud farm owner Hasan Ali Khan multiplied by over 100 times in six years from Rs 529 crore to Rs 54,268 crore in 2006-07, reveals CAG report tabled in Parliament on March 18, 2011. Khan, who is presently in custody of the Enforcement Directorate, has not filed returns for several years despite earning crores.

Silver Jubilee of Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) observed:

A Silver Jubilee Function of Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) was organized in New Delhi on March 17, 2011 to celebrate 25 years of its existence. Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram released the periodical "NARCONTROL", quarterly News Letter of NCB, on the occasion. Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) is the premier law enforcement and coordinating agency of India responsible for combating drug trafficking.

Goa 1st state to offer unemployment allowance to jobless:

Goa became the first state in the country to announce an allowance for the unemployed, when chief minister Digambar Kamat presented the 2011-12 budget on March 17, 2011. The monthly dole will be applicable only to unemployed under-graduates, who have been registered with the state employment exchange, and will be provided for a three-year period. The government has proposed a monthly unemployment subsistence allowance of a maximum of Rs 1,200 to those who have passed Class XII while those less qualified will receive less. An allocation of Rs 50 crore has been set aside in the budget for the purpose.

India's tallest Buddha unveiled: Measuring 80 feet, India's tallest statue of Lord Buddha was unveiled on the premises of Thai Buddha Vihar in Sarnath, Bihar on March 16, 2011. A joint Indo-Thai project conceived in 1970, the statue is built in an area of 2.5 acres and costs Rs 2 crore. Former prime minister of Thailand Surayud Chulanot and former governor Lord Abbot Wat of Dhamma Suthi in Thailand unveiled the sandstone statue.

"Indian nuclear power reactors will be revisited" – NPCIL: With the "feedback" that the Nuclear Power

Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) received from the Japanese nuclear crisis, “we are determined to revisit the 19 nuclear power reactors operating in India and if there are deficiencies, every step will be taken to upgrade their safety,” said S.K. Jain, Chairman and Managing Director, NPCIL, on March 17, 2011. The NPCIL had already revisited the nuclear power reactors in India after the Three Mile Island and Chernobyl accidents in 1979 and 1986 and took a number of steps to upgrade their safety. Several safety measures were implemented after a tsunami struck the Indian coast in December 2004, including the Kalpakkam coast in Tamil Nadu.

MM Joshi to continue as PAC Chairman: BJP on March 15, 2011 said Murli Manohar Joshi will continue as Chairman of Parliament's Public Accounts Committee for 2011-12, currently looking into anomalies in the 2G spectrum scam, as he is doing a “good job”. Senior party leader Yashwant Sinha has not been nominated to the PAC for the second year as he is part of JPC on the 2-G spectrum allocation scam. The PAC chairperson's post is reserved for the main opposition.



Section B: WORLD

News round up

India abstains from U.N. vote on Libya

India abstained from voting on a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution approving “all necessary measures,” including imposition of a no-fly zone over Libya on March 18, 2011. The resolution was passed with 10 members, including the U.S., France, the U.K. and Lebanon, voting in favour and five — Russia, China (both permanent members with veto rights), Brazil and Germany, besides India — abstaining.

In a compromise, while approving the no-fly zone, the resolution excluded “a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory.” It widened the earlier scope of sanctions passed unanimously by the UNSC by proposing the freezing of assets of seven more persons close to Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi and five other entities, including state-owned companies. The earlier sanctions include an arms embargo, assets freeze and travel ban on Colonel Qadhafi and his loyalists and a referral to the Hague-based International Criminal Court.

The anticipated military operations would be run from Sicily, where a NATO base and a U.S. naval air station are located.

As preparations get under way for an aerial assault, Egypt appears to be emerging as a rear support base for the opposition. The Wall Street Journal reported that Egypt has already started sending weapons to the opposition forces, following Washington's approval

Soon after the imposition of a no-fly zone authorised by the United Nations Security Council, Qadhafi announced a unilateral ceasefire but opposition forces say army attacks on rebels have continued.

India is world's largest arms importer – SIPRI

India has emerged as the largest importer of conventional arms, accounting for nearly a tenth of all arms transfer between 2006 and 2010, said the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in its latest arms transfer report published on March 15, 2011. The four largest importers of conventional weapons in 2006-10 are located in Asia. The share of the top four countries are: India (9 per cent), China (6 per cent), South Korea (6 per cent) and Pakistan (5 per cent).

Indian imports of major conventional weapons are driven by a range of factors. The most often cited relate to rivalries with Pakistan and China, as well as internal security challenges. India is also using its huge imports to develop domestic manufacturing capabilities. “As an importer, India is demanding offsets and transfers of technology to boost its own arms industry, and, in order to secure orders, major suppliers are agreeing to such demands”, says SIPRI.

The volume of deliveries to India in 2006–10 was 21 per cent higher than in 2001–2005. Aircraft accounted for 71 per cent of imports, with deliveries in 2010 of 35 Su-30MKI and 10 MiG-29SMT combat aircraft from Russia, as well as a second Phalcon airborne early warning aircraft from Israel. India imports 82 per cent of its list from Russia. Britain (six per cent) and Israel (three per cent) are the second and third largest suppliers of arms for India.

The average volume of worldwide arms transfers in 2006–10 was 24 per cent higher than in 2001–2005. The major recipient region in 2006–10 remained Asia and Oceania (43 per cent of all imports), followed by Europe (21 per cent), the Middle East (17 per cent), the Americas (12 per cent) and Africa (seven per cent).

The USA remains the world's largest exporter of military equipment, accounting for 30 per cent of global arms exports in 2006–10. During this period, 44 per cent of US deliveries went to Asia and Oceania, 28 per cent to the Middle East and 19 per cent to Europe.

SIPRI is an independent international institute, dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament. Its work is mostly funded by the Swedish parliament.

Egypt referendum supports constitutional changes

Egyptians have strongly backed constitutional changes that will allow the country to move quickly on to elections. Official results show that 77% of voters in the referendum on March 19, 2011 approved the changes. As many as 18.5 million people voted to support the changes. Turnout was 41.2 % of the 45 million eligible voters. The country's two main political groups, Mubarak's National Democratic Party and the Muslim Brotherhood, supported the proposals. The changes include:

- Reducing presidential terms from six years to four years and limiting the president to two terms
- Obliging the president to choose a deputy within 30 days of election
- Installing new criteria for presidential candidates, including a rule that they must be over 40 years old and not married to a non-Egyptian

Egypt dissolves internal security agency: Egypt's Interior Minister Mansour al-Issawi March 15, 2011 dissolved its internal security agency, which had been blamed for decades of human rights abuses. The State Security Investigation Service (SSIS) will be replaced with a new "National Security Force". The actions of the SSIS helped ignite the popular uprising that overthrew President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011.

Bahrain declares state of emergency: Bahrain's king declared a three-month state of emergency on March 15, 2011 in an effort to quell a month-old uprising by the Shia community. The move by King Hamed ibn Isa Khalifa comes after armed forces from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates poured into Bahrain with the support of the government after worsening violence paralyzed Manama, the capital, in recent days. The force marked the first cross-border military operation to quell unrest since the Arab world's rebellions began in December. The Bahraini government has long been known for discrimination against its own Shia majority, who comprise 60 per cent of the population.

"Japan quake shortened day" – NASA: The massive earthquake that struck Japan March 11, 2011 was so powerful that it accelerated the Earth's rotation speed, shortening the length of the day by 1.8 microseconds, according to a new analysis by NASA. According to scientists at the U.S. space agency, the 8.9-magnitude quake shifted the way the Earth's mass is distributed, which made the planet spin a little faster, cutting the 24-hour day by an estimated 1.8 microseconds. Initial data suggested the quake moved Japan's main island about eight feet and shifted the Earth's figure axis, around which the Earth's mass is balanced, by about 17 cm, said Richard Gross, a geophysicist at NASA.

Messenger is 1st spacecraft to enter Mercury's orbit: A NASA spacecraft named 'MESSENGER' began orbiting Mercury on March 17, 2011, becoming the first to fly around the solar system's innermost planet. The spacecraft began its journey more than six years ago, travelling through the inner solar system and embarking on flybys of Earth, Venus and Mercury.

Nepal stops using images of former king on banknotes: Banknotes carrying the image of the former king in Nepal have ceased to be legal tender from March 15, 2011. Old notes can be exchanged for new ones depicting Mount Everest. Since Nepal has had its own currency, the king's portrait or name has been inscribed on it. Nepal became a republic in May 2008. After a decade-long Maoist rebellion, a peace agreement was reached in 2006. The monarchy was finally abolished in 2008. The former king, Gyanendra, is now living as a civilian.

Iran launches Kavoshgar-4: Iran has launched a rocket into space carrying a test capsule designed to house an animal amid Western concerns over Tehran's scientific advances. The Kavoshgar-4 rocket was launched on March 15, 2011.

Ex-banker to head Olympic Authority for Rio Olympics: Brazil's former central bank chief, Henrique Meirelles, was on March 15, 2011 appointed to lead preparations for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro by President Dilma Rousseff. As head of the Olympic Public Authority, he will manage a multi-million dollar budget and a staff of around 170. Brazil is also hosting the football World Cup in 2014.

Issoufou wins presidential election in Niger: Niger opposition leader Mahamadou Issoufou of the Social Democratic Party won the Presidential run-off election organised on March 12, 2011 with nearly 58% of the vote. Niger, a largely desert nation in West Africa, has huge reserves of uranium and has attracted billions of dollars of investment. It remains one of the world's poorest nations, and has witnessed a number of coups since independence from France in 1960.

Jordan's monarch sets up National Dialogue Committee: Jordan's government on March 15, 2011 approved the creation of a 52-strong National Dialogue Committee charged with drawing up a new electoral law within three months. Jordan's monarch King Abdullah II said that the committee would help in developing a productive political dialogue framework that enhances achievements and stability.

First female SAARC secretary-general assumes office: The newly-appointed secretary-general of the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), Fathimath Dhiyana Saeed of Maldives, assumed office at the SAARC Secretariat in the Nepali capital Kathmandu on March 2, 2011. Saeed is the tenth secretary-general of SAARC and the first woman to occupy this position.

Lakshmi Mittal retains top spot in Asian Rich List:

NRI steel tycoon Lakshmi Mittal has retained his top position as the richest Asian in the UK. According to the Asian Rich List 2011 by Eastern Eye, a weekly publication brought out by the Asian Media and Marketing Group, Mittal

and his family's wealth stood at 15.5 billion pounds. The Hinduja brothers - Srichand, Gopi, Prakash and Ashok, who have global business in many sectors, including oil, power, transport, IT and banking, have a wealth of 9 billion pounds. Vedanta Chairman Anil Agarwal came third with 4.5 billion pounds worth - 500 million pounds more than a year ago.

Section C: AWARDS

INDIA

Gen. V K Singh honoured at the US Army Hall of Fame:

The Chief of Army Staff (CoAS) General V K Singh on March 11, 2011 became the first Indian officer to be inducted into the 'Hall of Fame' of US Army War College, Carlisle, USA. This distinction is extended by the US Army, to officers from foreign countries, who rise to the post of 'Chief' of their respective Armies, after attending the Course at US Army War College. General VK Singh (then Brigadier) passed out from the US Army War College in 2000-01.

Mahasweta Devi conferred Yashwantrao Chavan Award:

85-year old Bengali writer and activist Mahasweta Devi was conferred the Yashwantrao Chavan National Award 2010 in Mumbai on March 12, 2011 "for her contribution to national integration, democratic values and the socio-economic development of India."

Girdhar Rathi selected for Bihari Puraskar:

Noted poet Girdhar Rathi has been selected for the Bihari Puraskar for 2010 for his poetry collection. He was chosen in March 2011 for his collection of poems, 'Anta Ke Sanshaya'. The Bihari Puraskar, instituted by the K. K. Birla Foundation in 1991, is only for Rajasthani writers and carries a citation, a plaque and prize money of Rs. 1 lakh.

Shikha Awasthi is the first woman to get AFMC sword of honour:

Medical cadet Shikha Awasthi became the first woman doctor to receive the sword of honour for overall excellence at the passing out parade of the 45th course of the Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC) on March 18, 2011. Apart from the sword of honour, Awasthi also received the President's gold medal and the Kalinga trophy for overall academic excellence.

Mahashweta Devi gets 2nd term as Research Professor:

The Human Resource Development Ministry has appointed writer-social activist Mahasweta Devi as National Research Professor for a second term of five years from February 2011. She will be entitled to an honorarium of Rs. 75,000 a month in accordance with the existing terms and conditions under the National Research Professorship Scheme. Appointed National Research Professor in February 2006, Mahashweta Devi has continued her social work, and has contributed to the study of the women, Dalit and rural tribal communities of West Bengal.

Anusha Rizvi wins Gollapudi Award: Anusha Rizvi, director of 'Peepli Live', has been chosen for the 14th

'Gollapudi Srinivas National Award' for the year 2010 by the Gollapudi Srinivas Memorial Foundation in March 2011. The award, instituted by the Gollapudi Srinivas Memorial Foundation, is given to a debutant director annually in memory of Gollapudi Srinivas, who passed away in an accident while making his first film.

Chowmahalla Palace wins UNESCO Asia Pacific Merit:

The prestigious UNESCO Asia Pacific Merit award for cultural heritage conservation was presented to Hyderabad's Chowmahalla Palace on March 15, 2011. Chowmahalla Palace, the royal seat of the Asaf Jahi rulers, bagged the coveted award after edging out heritage sites in 43 countries. UNESCO appreciated the restoration of the palace and efforts to rescue 'an extraordinary complex from years of abandonment'.

WORLD

Chinese writer Bi Feiyu wins Asia's top literary prize:

Acclaimed Chinese author Bi Feiyu on March 17, 2011 won Asia's top literary prize for his "Three Sisters", set during the Cultural Revolution. Bi edged out four other shortlisted authors to secure the USD 30,000 Man Asian Literary Prize with the story of three women who "strive to change the course of their destinies" in one of China's most chaotic political periods. His book edged out four other shortlisted submissions, from India and Japan, to take the award.

Julian Barnes wins Cohen Prize:

Author Julian Barnes, whose novels include Flaubert's Parrot and England, England, was presented with the David Cohen Prize for Literature in London on March 18, 2011. Past recipients of the £40,000 prize, described by judges as the UK's Nobel Prize for Literature, include Harold Pinter and Doris Lessing. The biennial lifetime achievement award went to Seamus Heaney in 2009.

ECONOMY & CORPORATE

Public Relations Council of India awards given: The Hindu's consultant V. Kalidas was conferred the 'Hall of Fame' National Award for 2011 for his contribution to the media industry in Chandigarh on March 17, 2011. The awards were given to 10 other public relations professionals Global PR Conclave, organised by the Public Relations Council of India (PRCI). The other awardees are: Pragnya Ram (Aditya Birla Management Corporation Limited); S. Ramesh Krishnan (Maruti Suzuki); Deepak Jolly (Coca

Cola); Renuka B. Salwan (Bureau of Indian Standards);
Jayaprakash Rao K. (Regional PRO, DRDO, Bangalore);
B.K. Usha Didi (Brahmkumaris, Mount Abu); K.S. Narahari

(Texas Instruments Limited); C.K. Sardana; Ujjwal
Chowdhury (ISB&M School of Communication); and
Ramesh Kumar Mattoo (Suzlon Energy Limited).

Section D: ECONOMY & CORPORATE

News round up

Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana to have nine sub-schemes in 2011-12

The Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) will be implemented in the coming year (2011-12) with a budget of Rs. 7860 crore and nine sub-schemes. This represents a quantum jump in funds from Rs. 6775 crore in 2010-11 and wide expansion in the scope of the scheme.

Sharing the progress of implementation of Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana with the Parliamentary Consultative Committee on March 17, 2011, Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar informed that the RKVY will now have nine sub-schemes. Three of the sub-schemes were introduced in 2010-11 and will be continued this year also. The sub-schemes are as follows:

Extending Green Revolution to the Eastern Region of the Country: This sub-scheme gets an allocation of Rs. 400 crore and targets improvement in the rice based cropping systems of Assam, West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand, eastern Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

Integrated Development of 60,000 Pulses Villages in Rainfed Areas: This sub-scheme aims at attaining self-sufficiency in production of pulses within the next three years. An amount of Rs. 300 crores has been proposed to promote 60,000 pulses villages in rainfed areas for increasing crop productivity and strengthening market linkages.

Promotion of Oil Palm: It seeks to give special attention will be paid to oil palm as it is one of the most efficient oil crops. Accordingly, an amount of Rs. 300 crores has been provided to bring 60,000 hectares under oil palm plantation, by integrating the farmers with the markets.

Initiative on Vegetable Clusters: Growing demand for vegetables will be met by a robust increase in the productivity and market linkage. For this purpose, an efficient supply chain will be established, to make quality vegetables available at competitive prices. An amount of Rs.300 crores has been provided for this.

Nutri-cereals: To promote balanced nutrition, higher production of bajra, jowar, ragi and other millets will be promoted in the arid and semi-arid regions of the country. Additionally, projects will be taken up to upgrade their processing technologies and create awareness regarding

their health benefits. Outlay for this programme is Rs. 300 crores.

National Mission for Protein Supplements: This Mission is being launched with an allocation of Rs.300 crores to take up activities to promote animal based protein production through livestock development, dairy farming, piggery, goat rearing and fisheries in selected blocks.

Accelerated Fodder Development Programme: To accelerate the production of fodder through intensive promotion of technologies to ensure its availability throughout the year, Rs. 300 crores have been provided for Accelerated Fodder Development Programme. It will benefit farmers in 25,000 villages.

Rainfed Area Development Programme: This programme aims at improving productivity of crops in rainfed areas.

Saffron Mission: This programme aims at revival of saffron cultivation in Jammu & Kashmir. It gets an allocation of Rs. 105 crores during 2011-12.

Health Ministry sets up task force on pharmaceutical industry

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on March 15, 2011 constituted a task force to evolve a long-term strategy for addressing the issues faced by the Indian pharmaceutical industry. The Terms of Reference of the Task Force would be:

1. Evolve a Short, Medium & Long term policy & Strategy to make India as a hub for Drug Discovery, Research & Development.
2. Evolve strategies to further the interests of Indian Pharma industry in the light of issues related to Intellectual Property Rights and recommend strategies to capitalize the opportunity of 60 to 80 Billion USD Drugs going off – Patent over next 5 years.
3. Evolve Policy measures to assure National Drugs Security i.e.
 - Promoting indigenous production of bulk Drugs
 - Preventing take over of Indian Pharma industry by MNCs
 - Drug Pricing
 - Promotion of Generic Drugs and Recommend measures to assure adequate availability of Quality Generic Drugs at affordable prices.

4. Recommend measures to tackle the problem of spurious drugs – use of anti counterfeit technologies.

5. Consider and advise on any other issue incidental to the above.

6. Devise roadmaps for implementation of all recommended measures.

The twelve member Task Force under the Chairmanship of Secretary Health Research and DG ICMR and co-chaired by DGHS will have members drawn from National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority, Department of Industry Policy and Promotion, Indian Drug Manufacturers Association, Mumbai, Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance, Mumbai, Organization of Pharmaceutical Producers of India, Mumbai, Federation of Pharmaceutical Entrepreneurs, Gurgaon, Confederation of Indian Pharmaceutical Industry, Bulk Drug Manufacturers' Association, Hyderabad, SME Pharma Industry Confederation, New Delhi and Drug Controller General of India as the Member Secretary. In addition, the Chairman of the Task Force may also co-opt any other expert in the relevant area as is considered necessary.

'NBFCs' retail lending will catch up with banks by 2013' – CRISIL

Credit rating agency CRISIL has assessed that the retail loan portfolio of NBFCs, excluding mortgages, is likely to equal that of commercial banks by end March-2013. NBFCs' loan portfolio — personal loans, car loans, vehicle loans, loans against shares/gold/property — could see a 20 per cent compounded annual growth over the next two years to reach Rs 4 lakh crore, from the current Rs 2 lakh crore, the rating agency said. The report titled 'Retail NBFCs: The shine is back, but will it last?' was released on March 13, 2011.

Reach: The study says that NBFCs will increase their market share because of their ability to reach out to rural areas. About 60 per cent of NBFCs' business comes from rural and semi-urban areas, against one-third for banks.

Asset quality: The study also said that the asset quality of NBFCs will continue to improve over the medium term and their gross non-performing assets are expected to decline to around 2.2 per cent by end-March 2012, from 3.5 per cent as on March 2010. The improvement will be driven by a structural shift in asset composition towards secured asset classes, stronger underwriting norms and monitoring mechanisms and a favourable business environment. Currently vehicle loans constitute 60 per cent of the asset portfolio for NBFCs. But going ahead, there would be

greater diversity in assets classes with a rise in the share of gold loans and loans against property.

CAG detects huge gap between PAN card holders and tax returns

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has asked the Income Tax Department to monitor the issuance of Permanent Account Number (PAN) cards to ensure that an individual taxpayer does not end up getting multiple cards. In its report (2010-11) on 'Direct Taxes' tabled in Parliament on March 18, 2011, the CAG pointed to the glaring mismatch between the number of PAN card holders and the number of individual assessee's filing income tax returns. The government auditor has revealed that while a total of 958 lakh PAN cards were issued up to March 2010, the number of I-T returns filed last fiscal added up to a mere 340.9 lakh.

A PAN card allotted to an individual taxpayer is the unique identification number that helps the tax authorities in tracking tax compliance. Noting the huge gap of 617.1 lakh between the number of PAN card holders and the number of tax returns filed, the CAG suggested that the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) should identify the reasons for such a massive difference and utilise the information to enhance I-T assessee base. Significantly, while the number of PAN card holders went up by 117.7 per cent during the 2005-06 to 2009-10, the number of I-T returns filed in the same period has increased by a mere 14.4 per cent.

CAG raps 5 regulators for keeping surplus funds out of government accounts: The CAG also pulled up five regulators for keeping surplus funds worth over Rs. 2,142 crore that had been collected by way of fee and penalty, outside the government accounts in "contravention of Constitutional provision." In this regard, the five regulators that have come under the CAG lens are the Securities and Exchange Board of India, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority, the Pension Fund Regulatory Development Authority, the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board.

RBI committee suggests single policy rate regime

In a move that will reduce uncertainty in liquidity and short-term interest rates, a Reserve Bank of India committee on March 16, 2011 suggested a single policy rate regime, on the lines of the US Fed Rate or the Bank Rate of the Bank of England.

The committee on the operating procedure of monetary policy headed by Deepak Mohanty, an executive director of RBI, said in its report the **repo rate should be the single policy rate** to unambiguously signal the stance of monetary policy to achieve the macroeconomic objectives of growth with price stability. "The repo rate will operate within a corridor set by the Bank Rate and the reverse repo rate. As the repo rate changes, the Bank Rate and the reverse repo rate should change automatically," the report said.

At present, the repo rate acts as the policy rate when liquidity is in deficit mode while reverse repo becomes the operating rate when there liquidity is surplus. The group feels such a scenario is not a convention followed globally and two rates may create confusion among market players regarding the stance of the policy when liquidity alternates between surplus and deficit mode in quick succession.

The report also urges **reactivation of the bank rate**, which has been dormant as RBI is using key policy rates to signal the direction of interest rates. The Mohanty panel says the Bank Rate would be the rate at which RBI would provide liquidity under a new collateralised Exceptional Standing Facility (ESF) up to one per cent of net demand and time liabilities (NDTL) of banks. The ESF should be carved out of the required statutory liquidity ratio (SLR) portfolio.

The committee also recommended an increase in the **minimum level of the cash reserve ratio** requirement by banks from 70 per cent to 80 per cent on a daily basis.

IRDA wants 150% solvency ratio by 2014

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) on March 12, 2011 directed the general insurance companies to augment the Indian Motor Third Party Insurance Pool (IMTPIP) reserves to maintain a solvency ratio of 150 per cent by March 2014 from the present 126 per cent in order to meet the cost of higher compensation to be paid to road accident victims. The same ratio has to be maintained afterwards. Besides, IRDA has asked the companies to maintain the solvency ratio at a minimum of 130 per cent for all lines of businesses by the end of March this year.

The latest orders on the solvency ratio have been issued in the light of IRDA's findings on the actuarial valuation of the IMTPIP. The findings were from a report submitted by KP Sarma, the authority's consultant actuary, which established the ultimate loss ratios for the years 2007-08, 2008-09 and 2009-10 at 172.3 per cent, 181.81 per cent and 194.15 per cent respectively.

The solvency ratio measures the size of a company's after-tax income as compared to the firm's total debt obligations. It provides a measurement of how likely a company will be to continue meeting its debt obligations. Generally speaking, the lower a company's solvency ratio, the greater the probability that the company will default on its debt obligations.

"India ahead of US in energy efficiency" – The Climate Group

The market for low carbon goods and services in India could touch \$135 billion by 2020 creating some 10.5 million jobs, revealed a report by The Climate Group on March 18, 2011. The Climate Group is an independent, not-for-profit organization working internationally with government and business leaders to advance smart policies and technologies to cut global emissions and accelerate a clean industrial revolution. It was founded in 2004 and has operations in Australia, China, Europe, India and North America.

The report – India's Clean Revolution – said that enormous potential exists for generating new income and jobs by developing domestic renewable energy resources and clean technologies that improve the efficiency of sectors such as transport and industry.

According to the report, India is making more progress than the US on energy efficiency, and this market is expected to treble to \$77 billion in next 10 years. India now ranks fifth in the world in terms of wind energy production. Bold low carbon policies will increase India's energy independence and help provide access to energy to those who still lack it. The low cost labour and highly skilled manufacturing base will make India a major hub for clean technologies.

The government has set up a committee headed by Kirit Parikh, former member, Planning Commission, to formulate a low carbon development strategy. The committee is expected to come out with its report soon, which will detail the plans and scope to achieve low carbon growth through reduction in energy consumption in sectors such as transport, building and infrastructure among others.

Government approves 9.5% EPFO rate: The Union Finance Ministry on March 17, 2011 approved a 9.5 per cent interest rate to over 4.7 crore depositors with the Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) for 2010-11. Central Provident Fund Commissioner Samirendra Chatterjee said that the Fund's calculations regarding Rs. 1,731 crore surplus in the interest suspense account were

found correct by the finance ministry following which it approved this higher rate of return. The EPFO had been paying 8.5 per cent interest on PF deposits since 2005-06. In September last year, it had recommended an increase in interest rate to 9.5 per cent for 2010-11 after discovering Rs. 1,731 crore surplus in their accounts. The finance ministry had earlier argued that the surplus shown by the ministry was not real after a CAG report has called the EPFO's so called surplus unverifiable.

RBI hikes repo, reverse repo rates: The RBI raised the repo and reverse repo rates by a quarter per cent in its Mid-Quarter Monetary Policy Review: March 2011 unveiled on March 17, 2011. The new repo rate is 6.75 per cent while the reverse repo rate is at 5.75 per cent. The repo rate is what banks pay the RBI to borrow from it and reverse repo is the rate that RBI pays banks. Higher policy rates by RBI could result in increased interest rates on bank deposits and loans in the future. The RBI also raised the inflation estimate for March 2011 to eight per cent from seven per cent earlier. The past three months have already seen several rate hikes by public and private sector banks. The RBI has left the cash reserve ratio and SLR rates untouched at 6 per cent and 24 per cent respectively and has left the GDP growth projection of 8.6 per cent for 2010-11.

Mobile money transfer fee cut to 10p from 25p: National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has reduced the switching fee for mobile money transfers using the inter-bank mobile payment service (IMPS) to 10 paise from the proposed 25 paise for a successful transaction to the remitting bank. It would be effective from April 1 until the end of the next fiscal. This service was launched in November last year. The NPCI has already issued 66 lakh mobile money identifiers (MMIDs) — the account number through which one can do transactions on mobile phones — till the end of February 2011. IMPS allows fund transfer between individuals through their mobile phones. It provides any time instant money transfer service through mobile phones to any other person registered for the IMPS service in any of the participating banks.

11.25 job cards distributed under MNREGA in 2009-10: As many as 11.25 crore job cards under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act were issued to people in 619 districts across the country in 2009-10. Just over five crore households received employment in works like water conservation and water harvesting, drought proofing, irrigation canals and renovation of traditional water canals, according to the MNREGA annual report, tabled by the Rural Development ministry in Parliament on March 14, 2011. Of these works, 51 per cent were employed for water conservation, 17 per

cent for provision for irrigation facility to land owned by SC/ST/BPL beneficiaries, 17 per cent for rural connectivity and 14 per cent for land development. The share of women working in the schemes has increased to 48 per cent as compared to 43 per cent in 2007-8, the report said, adding that the average wages paid per person days was Rs 90.

Cairn-Vedanta deal gets SEBI green signal: Vedanta Chairman Anil Aggarwal cleared a major roadblock in his \$9.6 billion (around Rs 43,200 crore) takeover of Cairn India when the market regulator SEBI (Securities and Exchange Board of India) gave its green signal to the deal on March 19, 2011. In August 2010, Vedanta agreed to buy 51 per cent in Cairn India in what was till then the biggest deal in India's oil and gas space.

Any deal involving acquisition of 15 per cent or more in a listed company requires the acquirer to make an open offer for buying 20 per cent stake from public shareholders. This offer has to be approved by SEBI. The deal, however, is yet to get the government's approval on account of differences over who will bear the royalty burden on production from Cairn's Rajasthan block. At present, ONGC, a 30 per cent partner in the block, bears the entire burden. It wants this to be shared the new joint venture partner Vedanta. Cairn Energy (51% owner of Cairn Energy) has declined to accept ONGC's demand.

5,74,673 villages in the country have telephone connectivity: As many as 5,74,673 villages out of 5,93,601 inhabited villages in the country have telephone connectivity through Village Public Telephones (VPTs) as on January 31, 2011. The remaining villages are expected to be covered through VPTs by February, 2012. This information was given by Sachin Pilot, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology in Parliament on March 17, 2011.

All village panchayats to be covered under broadband by 2012: Under Bharat Nirman, the Government envisages to cover all the 2,50,000 village panchayats with broadband by 2012. As of January 2011, 97,548 Village Panchayats have been covered with broadband. As regards funds no separate allocation has been made under Bharat Nirman. However, funds have been allocated in different schemes of Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) under which Gram Panchayats are being covered.

1st Green Manufacturing Summit organised: The first 'Green Manufacturing Summit' on product, process and technology was organised in New Delhi on March 17, 2011. Union Cabinet Minister for Commerce and Industry Anand Sharma informed that India ranks 2nd in the world in terms of

manufacturing competitiveness. He further reiterated, "Manufacturing sector engages 11% of India's workforce and contributes to a fifth of our GDP and nearly half of our exports.

GSM subscriber base at 555.06 mn: GSM telecom operators added 14.69 million subscribers in February this year, taking the all-India GSM cellular subscriber base to 555.06 million users, the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) said on March 17, 2011. The GSM subscriber base stood at 540.37 million at the end of January, 2011. The numbers, however, do not include additions by Tata Docomo, the GSM services of Tata Teleservices, and Reliance Telecom. Bharti Airtel, the largest GSM player, added 3.20 million users in February, taking its total subscriber base to 158.99 million. It had 28.65 per cent market share as of the end of the month followed by Vodafone Essar at 23.59 per cent.

ICRER Report on Direct Selling unveiled: The "Socio-Economic Impact of Direct Selling: Need for Policy Stimulus", a report on the direct selling business, was released on March 18, 2011 by ICRIER and the Indian Direct Selling Association. The report has used data from a national survey to underline that direct selling – the method where companies sell products to consumers bypassing supermarkets or grocery shops – has reduced unemployment, particularly among women. Amway, the top global direct selling brand, and Tupperware

are the most visible face of direct selling in India. The report shows that in 2008-09 and 2009-10, when the Indian economy was battling a growth slow down, the number of direct sellers grew to 3 million from 1.8 million, or a growth rate of nearly 67 per cent. Of these, nearly 70 per cent were women. At the same time, the sector grew at a rate of 17 percent in 2008-09 and at 24 per cent in 2009-10.

"Real estate, telecom most corruption prone" –

KPMG: In the season of scams, the real estate sector has topped the list of most corruption-prone sectors in the country with the telecom sector coming in the second position, according to a KPMG survey released on March 15, 2011. Over 32 per cent of the respondents have voted for real estate and construction sector as the most prone to corruption, followed by the telecom sector by 17 per cent.

The survey is based on the responses from 100 Indian and multi-national corporations operating in the country in diverse areas, including transportation and logistics, aviation, oil and gas, consumer goods, financial services, auto and chemicals. As many as 99 per cent of the corporations were of the view that the biggest impact of corruption on business was that it skewed the level playing field and attracted organisations with lesser capability to execute projects.



Section E: SPORTS

Quarter-finalists decided at ICC Cricket World Cup 2011

Pakistan will face West Indies at Shere Bangla National Stadium, Mirpur on March 23 while India will take on defending champions Australia at Sardar Patel Gujarat Stadium, Motera on March 24 in the quarter finals of the ICC World Cup following the completion of the league round recently. Other quarter-final matches are: New Zealand Vs South Africa at Shere Bangla National Stadium, Mirpur on March 25 and Sri Lanka Vs England at R. Premadasa Stadium, Colombo on March 26. First semi-final will be played at R. Premadasa Stadium, Colombo on March 29 while the second semi-final will held on March 30 at Punjab Cricket Association Stadium, Mohali. Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai is the venue of the final on April 2, 2011.

| TEAM STANDINGS | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|---|---|---|---|----|-----|--------|--|
| Group A | | | | | | | | |
| Team | P | W | L | T | NR | PTS | NRR | |
| PAK | 6 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 10 | +0.758 | |
| SL | 6 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 9 | +2.582 | |
| AUS | 6 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 9 | +1.123 | |
| NZ | 6 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 8 | +1.135 | |
| ZIM | 6 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 | +0.030 | |
| CAN | 6 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 2 | -1.987 | |
| KEN | 6 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | -3.042 | |

| Group B | | | | | | | | |
|---------|---|---|---|---|----|-----|--------|--|
| Team | P | W | L | T | NR | PTS | NRR | |
| SA | 6 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 10 | +2.026 | |
| IND | 6 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 9 | +0.900 | |
| ENG | 6 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 7 | +0.072 | |
| WI | 6 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 6 | +1.066 | |
| BAN | 6 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 6 | -1.361 | |
| IRE | 6 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 | -0.696 | |
| NED | 6 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | -2.045 | |

Bengal wins Syed Mushtaq title: Bengal beat Madhya Pradesh by a solitary run in the final to emerge champions in the National Twenty20 Championship for the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy at the Uppal Stadium in Hyderabad on March 16, 2011. It was Bengal's first major championship win at the senior level after 21 long years since Samabaran Banerjee-led side won the Ranji Trophy in 1990. Bengal team scored 142 for seven after being put into bat. Madhya Pradesh could only manage 141 for eight.

Wei and Wang win All England Open titles:

- Malaysia's Lee Chong Wei defended his All England Open men's singles title defeating Lin Dan of China 21-17, 21-17 in the final at Birmingham on March 13, 2011.
- In the women's section, top-seeded Wang Shixian regained title for China, earning it for the seventh time in 10 years after a 24-22, 21-18 victory in the final against Eriko Hirose of Japan.
- Men's doubles title was won by Mathias Boe & Carsten Mogensen of Denmark who defeated the Malaysian pair of Koo Kien Keat and Tan Boon Heong 21-15, 21-18, 21-18, in the final.
- Women's doubles was won by Wang Xiaoli and Yu Yang of China who beat Mizuki Fujii & Reika Kakiwa of Japan 21-2, 21-9.
- Mixed doubles title was won by China's Xu Chen & Ma Jin who defeated Thailand's Sudket Prapakamol & Saralee Thongthongkam 21-13, 21-9 in the final. India's Saina Nehwal lost to Hirose 21-11, 22-20 in the quarterfinals.

Wrestling Federation to launch 'Indian Wrestling League':

Indian Wrestling League, an event on the lines of hugely successful IPL, will be launched later this year, the Wrestling Federation of India announced on March 14, 2011. The WFI in collaboration with Kolkata based Leisure Sports will organise the League during November and December this year. Each team shall be named after the franchisee owner and will be permitted to have two foreign wrestlers in each style. The League will be held in seven weight categories for both men and women.

RECENT BOOKS:

- ❖ 'Only Time Will Tell' by Jeffrey Archer
- ❖ 'Urban Governance in India - Emerging Challenges in Liberalised Era' by Om Mahala
- ❖ 'Women Empowerment - Synchronising the Gender Power' by Jasprit Kaur Soni
- ❖ 'The Life of Gautama Buddha' by N.C. Panda
- ❖ 'The Inheritor' by Upendra Tankha
- ❖ 'The Monk as Man'

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| ❖ 'Leadership for Global Excellence in Education |
| ❖ 'Public Relations |