

INSIGHTS

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Team Insights

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NATIONAL**Department of Biotechnology to train professionals on clinical ethics**

- The Department of Biotechnology has collaborated with a PATH (Programme for Appropriate Technology in Health) associate to train professionals on “crisis management in clinical research”.
- It aims to identify the crisis (sources and route), equip oneself to tackle the crisis, to understand how to communicate during the crisis in medical research and undertake good crisis management practices. The Indian Institute of Mass Communication would also be a partner in the training programme.

Benefits of the Training Program:

- The DBT training workshop aims to address key personnel from various stakeholders like biopharmaceutical, industry, investigators, patient representatives, ethics committees, regulatory, media, civil society/patient advocacy group, NGOs and judiciary, who are susceptible to face or had faced crisis in the past, in the field of scientific and medical research and those who closely handles medical research.
- The audiences are expected to benefit from this ‘multi-disciplinary’ platform wherein they can understand and upgrade their knowledge through interactive and knowledge sharing platform through various ‘case studies’.

But this collaboration has been criticized:

- Earlier in 2010, PATH had vaccinated over 23,000 tribal girls in Khammam and Vadodara district but without getting informed consents from the parents or guardians of the participants who were all minors. The issue came to limelight when seven girls reportedly died following the injection, and the trials were suspended. The organisation has been facing stiff criticism since then.
- The Parliamentary panel too had recently accused the international organisation PATH of exploiting the loopholes in the system during a trial of Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccines and had also questioned the roles of the Indian Council of Medical Research(ICMR) and the Drug Controller-General of India(DGCI) in the entire process.
- Not only the ethical violations of PATH had been exposed but also there were doubts raised regarding the role of PATH- there was ‘conflict of interest’ because PATH has been proven to represent the interest of pharmaceutical countries(especially the U.S)

GM crops and Biopiracy

- A case for criminal prosecution of the Mahyco(a Bt Brinjal promoter which is partly owned by Monsanto) officials) for biopiracy has been revived with the Karnataka High Court dismissing a petition to stay the prosecution on October 11. The National Biodiversity Board (NBA) and the Karnataka Biodiversity Board (KBB) had filed the case for criminal prosecution.

- The company genetically modified local varieties of eggplant without mandatory approvals approval and laid illegal proprietary claim to the genetically modified seeds.
- This would provide Monsanto and Mahyco intellectual property resources that can restrict any making, using or selling of these licensed domestic eggplant products.
- The property claim over local varieties which Mahyco will backcross with their Bt Brinjal would possibly violate the Biodiversity Act 2002.

What is biopiracy?

Biopiracy is apart of a larger problem whereby developing countries rich in biodiversity, are exploited by transnational corporations and industries that make use of these resources.

Biopiracy, refers to the appropriation, generally by means of patents of legal rights over biological materials by international companies to develop food or medicines, without recompensing the countries from which they are taken.

Groups such as The Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration (ETC) claim that there exists many cases in which patents are being acquired for “inventions” that are closely based on indigenous traditional knowledge TK, or of ‘Plant Breeders’ Rights (PBR) certificates—a kind of Intellectual Property Rights system for plant varieties—being awarded for plant varieties that are virtually identical to “folk varieties” of the same plants.

Patents are granted to corporations who claim inventions based on indigenous resources or knowledge.

Wrongly awarded patents may occur because: the researcher may not have had enough time and resources to conduct “prior art” searches; the required standards of inventiveness being applied to patent applications may be too low; or the companies or scientific institutions applying for the patents may deliberately fail to cite the prior-art upon which their inventions are based.

More information: [Here](#)

NBA opposes raising height of Narmada dam

- The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) has urged the Central Government to halt the mega Sardar Sarovar Project at its present height of 122 meters. This will give the requisite benefits without uprooting thousands of rural and tribal people. Around 2.5 lakh people in 245 villages are still residing in submergence zones and there is no land to rehabilitate them.
- The Narmada Control Authority (NAC) under the Ministry of Water Resources oversees the compliance of the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal award by the basin States of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.
- The dam is at a height of 122 meters and it is proposed to raise it to the full height of 138 meters.
- Although the project got the largest Central funding (Rs. 5,736 crore) under the Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme, less than 30 per cent of the canal network has been laid in 30 years.

What is Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Program?

A large number of river valley projects, both multipurpose and irrigation have spilled over from Plan to Plan mainly because of financial constraints being faced by the State Governments. As a result of this, despite a huge investment having already been made on these projects, the country is not able to derive the desired benefits. There were 171 Major, 259 Medium and 72 ERM on-going Irrigation projects in the country at various stages of construction at the end of VIII Plan (i.e. end of March, 1997) with spillover cost of Rs. 75690 crore. This was a matter of grave concern for the Union Government and remedial measures for expeditious completion of some of the projects which were in advanced stage of completion became necessary.

The AIBP was conceived in the year 1996 by the Government of India in order to provide financial assistance to States to complete various ongoing projects in the country so that envisaged irrigation potential of the project could be created and thereby extend irrigation to more areas. Since its formulation, the terms of the programme have been widened and liberalized over the time.

Only those projects are considered under the Programme, which have the investment clearance of the Planning Commission. The Projects which are already receiving assistance from international/ domestic agencies such as NABARD etc. are not eligible for assistance under the Programme. However, the components of such projects which are not covered under such assistance by NABARD are considered for inclusion under the AIBP. Assistance to large projects is given for their phased completion so that benefits could start flowing early with comparatively smaller investments.

Presently, major, medium and Extension, Renovation and Modernization (ERM) projects are eligible for Central Assistance under AIBP. The surface water minor irrigation schemes of Special Category States as well as such schemes satisfying specified criteria in Non-Special Category States are also eligible for Central Assistance under AIBP.

Source: Ministry of Water Resources

INTERNATIONAL

[China says it would welcome move to liberalise visa regime](#)

- During PM Manmohan Singh's visit [which begins in Beijing on 22nd October] the two sides will sign a series of bilateral cooperation agreements covering a wide range of areas.

- China and India are looking forward to liberalise the current limits on business and tourism travel and relaxation of the visa regime.
- Relaxation of visa restrictions would be "conducive to promoting personnel exchanges, and economic and trade cooperation."
- With increasing movement of people between both countries, particularly for business, visa restrictions on travel to India has become a major issue in China, especially among businesspeople who often complain of long delays because of clearances needed from the Home Ministry.
- On the tourism front too, travellers have to put up a 10,000 Yuan (Rs. 1 lakh) deposit, and cannot reapply for visas for a two-month period after travel. Doing away with the latter restriction is one of the proposed changes that have been under discussion, although the deposit is seen by agents as the bigger obstacle.
- The main focus of the negotiation would be Border Defence Cooperation Agreement (BDCA) which is in the direction of earlier confidence building measures.
- Another proposal was building a Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor to strengthen investment, trade, infrastructure, other areas of cooperation such as industrial parks and to start negotiations on a regional trade agreement.
- This is of great significance to regional connectivity as this would bridge South Asia and East Asia.

[Saudi Arabia rejects Security Council seat](#)

- Saudi Arabia has rejected a rotating seat at the Security Council, as a mark of protest against the perceived inaction by the world body against Syria.
- Saudi Arabia had for the first time been elected by the General Assembly to become a non-permanent member.
- The monarchy being a staunch supporter of military action to topple President Bashar al-Assad said the Security Council is incapable of tackling international conflicts. The method, work mechanism and the double standards in the Security Council prevent it from properly shouldering its responsibilities towards world peace.
- Another reason was UNSC had also failed to settle the Israel-Palestinian issue and the Council's inability to turn West Asia into a zone free of weapons of mass destruction — an apparent reference to Israel's alleged stockpile of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.
- Russia, which has stood against regime change in Damascus was surprised by Saudi Arabia's unprecedented decision responded strongly saying that The kingdom's arguments arouse bewilderment, and the criticism of the U.N. Security Council in the context of the Syria conflict is particularly strange.
- Saudi Arabia's decision follows the recent UNSC resolution backing a Moscow-brokered deal that commits Syria to destroying its entire stockpile of chemical weapons to avoid possible western military strikes. Saudi Arabia slammed the move, which has allowed weapons inspectors to move into Syria to tally and destroy the Assad government's arsenal of chemical weapons. Riyadh is also widely perceived as a major supporter of armed fighters battling the Assad regime.

HEALTH

WHO alarm on lead poisoning among children

- The World Health Organisation has warned against devastating health consequences of lead poisoning, particularly for children, and called upon countries to strengthen national action to eliminate lead paint.
- Overall, 99% of the affected children live in low and middle income countries
- Lead paint may be found in home, on toys, furniture and on other objects. Decaying lead paint on walls, furniture and other interior surfaces creates contaminated dust that young children easily ingest. Mouthing lead-painted toys and other objects also exposes them to lead.
- It is estimated that 1,43,000 deaths every year result from lead poisoning and lead paint is a major contributor. Its use creates a health problem for many years into the future. The cost of replacing lead paint means people living in older, poorly maintained housing are particularly at risk, and this disproportionately affects economically-deprived communities.
- Worldwide, 30 countries have already phased out lead paint use. The Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint, co-led by the WHO and the United Nations Environment Programme, has set a target of 70 countries by 2015.

Impact of Lead Exposure

- At high levels of exposure, lead damages the brain and central nervous system to cause coma, convulsions and even death. Children who survive poisoning are often left with intellectual impairment and behavioural disorders.
- At lower levels of exposure, which cause no obvious symptoms and which were previously considered safe, lead is now known to produce a spectrum of injury across multiple body systems. In particular, lead affects brain development, resulting in reduced IQ, behavioural changes such as shortening of attention span and increased antisocial behaviour, and reduced educational attainment. These effects are believed to be irreversible.
- Adults are at increased risk of kidney disease and raised blood pressure.
- The WHO has identified lead as one of the 10 chemicals causing major public health concern, and lead requires action by member-states in order to protect the health of workers, children and women of reproductive age. It includes adopting regulations and procedures to eliminate the use of lead decorative paints and providing information to the public on renovation of homes where lead paint may have already been applied.

PERSONALITIES

Jnanpith winner Ravuri dead

- Ravuri Bharadhwaja, literary luminary and Jnanpith awardee, is dead. The popular writer is credited with penning 37 collections of short stories, 17 novels, four plays, and five radio plays. He contributed more to children's literature.