

India and UK Join Hands for Sustainable Crop Production



(L to R) Dr. Bala Subramaniam (ICAR), Dr. M.K Bhan, Shri Kapil Sibal, Mr. David Willetts, Dr. Guy Howard, and Mr. Steven Viccher at the signing ceremony

On 11 November 2010, in presence of Kapil Sibal, Minister of Science and Technology and David Willetts, the Minister for Universities and Science, UK, the letter of intent to

collaborate on sustainable crop production for international development was signed. The signatories included Dr M K Bhan, Secretary, Department of

Biotechnology (DBT); Dr A K Singh, Deputy Director General, Natural Resource Management, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR); Dr Guy Howard, Research and Evidence Representative Asia, DFID; Steven Viccher, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer for BBSRC. Both the ministers approved the initiation of joint research activity in this significant area. In his comments, Dr Bhan highlighted India's

strong capabilities in the area of crop research which can be utilised in other parts of the world including Africa to a large extent. ■

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HFSP 10TH ANNUAL AWARDEES MEET

Almost 200 scientists from different continents and disciplines congregated in the idyllic setting of the Hotel Leela Kempinski at the Kovalam Beach in Thiruvananthapuram for the 10th Awardees Meeting of the Human Frontier Science Program (HFSP). This annual event brings together scientists funded by HFSP to report on their work and to exchange ideas. The meetings are held in a different HFSP member country each year and this year, India, a member of HFSP since 2006, hosted the meeting. The Human Frontier Science Program Organization was founded in 1989 to support international research and training

at the frontiers of life sciences and on creating opportunities for young scientists. The Program has

supported about 5500 scientists from 65 countries over the last 20 years. The scientific meeting opened with ▶▶



Dr. (Ms) R Sowdhamini, Dr. Ernst-Ludwing Winnacker (HFSP, France) and Dr. VijayRaghavan (Director NCBS) in a conversation

► the presentation of the first HFSP Nakasone Award to Karl Deisseroth of Stanford University, USA, for his pioneering work on the development and application of ontogenetic techniques for the study of the relationship between neural circuits and behaviour. Another highlight of the meeting "Spotlight on India" featured talks from a selection of leading Indian Scientists, most of whom have benefited from HFSP funding. A special lecture on "Science looks at Ayurveda" by Dr. M. S. Valiathan was significant in view of his contributions to the science of Ayurveda. The second

special lecture titled "Life Sciences and Biotechnology in India - A rapidly evolving enterprise" by Dr M. K. Bhan, Secretary, DBT highlighted the massive investments the government is making in education, science and technology, the rapid growth of biotech institutions and industries in the country, efforts in attracting students to science, setting of knowledge/Bio clusters in Punjab, NCR and Bangalore etc.

The plenary lecture on the "Analysis of Pleistocene Hominid Genomes" on the subject of ancient DNA by Svante Paabo from the

Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, Germany culminated this exciting and fruitful meeting. Another highlight of this meeting was the participation of several young investigators from across the country giving them a unique opportunity to interact and meet with their seniors and peers.

This meeting was followed by a half day session on "Grant writing and funding options in Life Sciences" specially organised for the benefit of young Indian scientists. ■

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Indo-US Agreement for Setting-up Joint Clean Energy Research and Development Centre

During the recent visit of American President Barack Obama, India and the United States resolved to strengthen their Partnership to Advance Clean Energy (PACE) towards creating the green economy of the future. To this end, both countries will undertake collaborative efforts for research and deployment of clean energy technologies. An agreement to establish a Joint Clean Energy Research and Development Center was signed by Dr. M. K. Bhan, Secretary Department of

Biotechnology and Dr. Timothy Roemer, US Ambassador to India.

The Indo-U.S. Joint Clean Energy Research and Development Center (Indo-US JCERDC) will be established under a joint initiative between the Government of India (GOI) and the US Department of Energy (DOE) to facilitate joint research and development aimed towards rapid deployment for clean energy technologies. Initial priority areas to be focused upon include solar energy, second generation biofuels, and building efficiency. The Govt. of India and US DOE will each provide US\$ 5 million each year for 5 years to support the collaborative activities under the

JCERDC. The center will receive private funding to match both GOI and US DOE funding.

The Center will involve active multi-agency participation including those from academic and private sectors of both countries working in a consortia mode. The consortium will be self-selecting teams with entities or individuals drawn from national labs, academic institutions, private sector, NGOs etc. Awards will be made to consortia which have knowledge, experience and intent to undertake first-rate collaborative research programs of mutual interest in the three priority areas identified. The consortia will leverage existing resources and physical infrastructure and bring together talent from both countries.

From the Indian side the program will be coordinated by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and the Department of Science and Technology (DST), and will be administered through the binational Indo-US Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF). ■

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Stakeholders Meeting for Indo-US Joint Clean Energy Research Centre

Working together with Norway

DBT and the Research Council of Norway, Govt. of Norway initiated bilateral collaboration in the area of Aquaculture and Marine Biotechnology in 2008. Three multi-centric projects have been supported under this collaboration involving 17 Indian institutions. Indo-Norway platform for developing candidate vaccines to invertebrate, piscine and avian species (InNoVacc) is one of the three projects involving Anna University (PI: Prof. K. Sankaran); International Centre for Genetic Eng. & Biotechnology (PI: Dr. Sunil K. Lal); Fisheries College and Research Institute, TANUVAS (PI: Prof. Riji John) and Annamalai University (PI: Dr. S. T. Somasundaram). Prof. Espen Rimstad, Norwegian School of Veterinary Sciences, Oslo is the PI for the Norwegian side comprising of Norwegian College of Fishery Science, Tromso ; National Veterinary Institute, Oslo and Invert Norbio, Thormohlensgate, Bergen.

The main focus of this project is to develop candidate vaccines for invertebrate, piscine and avian species, specifically for White-Spot Syndrome Virus (WSSV) of the Shrimps, Salmon Viruses (ISAV, SVCV), Avian Influenza Virus and Noda Virus.



The fourth meeting of the investigators of this Indo-Norwegian collaborative project was held at Tromso, Norway on September 20-22, 2010. Mr Sanjay Goel, Director, Finance and Dr A.K.Rawat also attended the meeting on behalf of the DBT where the progress of various sub-projects was presented by the respective investigators.

The investigators also discussed priority areas where close collaboration is needed to achieve the targets as well as detailed technical programme for next year. It was decided that the Indian students will visit Norway to learn histopathology techniques, study of vaccination trials in aquaculture system and conducting infection experiments using the lipid modified proteins. ■

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3rd North Eastern Bioinformatics Network (NEBInet) Coordinators

DBT has established 26 Bioinformatics Centres in 8 States in the north eastern region of the country which are networked through high speed communication network. These centres are progressing well in terms of access, dissemination of information resources and more importantly training of students, teachers for using computer based resources for education and research. In order to review the functioning of these centres, a meeting of North Eastern Bioinformatics Network (NEBInet) Coordinators was organised at Institute of Bioresources & Sustainable Development (IBSD), Imphal on 11-12 November, 2010.

The meeting came up with



Participants at the NEBInet Co-ordinators meeting

important recommendations on manpower issues, release of grants-in-aid to these centres. The centres were urged to explore the possibility of partnering with the National Knowledge Network (NKN) as well as use common e-mail server for sharing information with other NEBInet Coordinators.

A group training was conducted on 13th November 2010

for the Coordinators of NER-DeLCON for accessing e-journal resources in order to help enhance the user community in the North Eastern States. It was suggested that the publishers of DeLCON can be invited for institutional training in the future. ■

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