

Need to conserve bio-diversity, says J.C. Bose fellow

Bio-diversity is depleting at a very fast rate due to environmental deterioration, over-exploitation and negative impact of invasive exotic species,” according to Prof. R. K. Kohli, Dean (Research) and the senior-most Professor of Science Faculty at Panjab University. Prof. Kohli, who has been selected for the J.C. Bose Fellowship by the Central Department of Science & Technology, told that bio-diversity, a renewable resource, is very important as it provides food, medicine, fibre, building material and fuel. He disclosed that India, with 2.4 per cent of the world’s land and eight per cent of the world’s biodiversity, was a signatory to the convention on Biological Diversity. “Of the 34 hot spot zones for bio-diversity the world over, India is credited with four, where over 1,500 endemic plants occur or the rate of species depletion is high. And for conserving the rich biodiversity, habitat and associated cultural heritage, India has 17 biosphere reserves.” The Fellowship carries Rs.25,000 per month in addition to regular income and a contingency of Rs.10 lakh per annum for conferences and other expenses. Prof. Kohli is the only Indian so far to be certified/accredited as senior ecologist the highest global accreditation.

Indian, Pakistani Commanders to meet in bid to end bloody LoC skirmishes

Brigade-level Commanders of India and Pakistan will meet on the Line of Control in Poonch hoping to defuse 10 days of bloody skirmishes which have left six soldiers dead and led to artillery deployment close the Line of Control (LoC) for the first time in a decade. The meeting between 10 Brigade Commander T.S. Sandhu and his Pakistani counterpart, 6 Sector Commander Amir Sohail Ashraf. The fighting began on June 11 after Border Security Force soldier P.K. Mishra was shot dead by a sniper. Soldiers at the post, where Mishra was stationed, code named Kranti, returned the fire. Two days later, soldier Harvinder Singh was shot dead in firing on a nearby post, code named Kripan. Islamabad has not offered any official comment on the clashes. However, Pakistan shut down the Chakan-da-Bagh border outpost for local trade and suspended the weekly bus service from Poonch to Rawalakote.

PPP loyalist Ashraf elected Pakistan Prime Minister

After three days of uncertainty, Pakistan got its new Prime Minister in Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) loyalist Raja Parvez Ashraf, who enters the office with a corruption case, already in the Supreme Court, that earned him the nickname ‘Raja Rental’. Mr. Ashraf was elected premier with 211 votes in the National Assembly, well above the halfway mark of 172. Though there were five candidates after the close of withdrawals, it was a straight fight between the PPP and the PML(N). Maulana Fazl-ur-Rahman of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) opted out on the floor of the House and abstained from voting. Apart from the court battles including the one that did his predecessor Yusuf Raza Gilani in, the biggest problem confronting Mr. Ashraf is the acute power crisis, as a result of which most parts of the country are getting barely a few hours of electricity every day. This led to large-scale rioting across Punjab, and Mr. Ashraf has promised to deal with this issue on a priority basis; an assurance that has instilled little confidence because he had been Minister for Water and Power for three years before being dropped from the Cabinet in February 2011.

Ruskin Bond’s books now as comics

Mussoorie-based children’s writer Ruskin Bond’s literary work ‘The Blue Umbrella’ and ‘Angry River’ will now be available as comics. The septuagenarian author is delighted to see his literary work in the new format. “I have personally been a huge fan of ‘Amar Chitra Katha’ from the days the comics were launched. My congratulations to the talented artists and scriptwriters for making my stories so attractive in the comic book form. Both *The Blue Umbrella* and *Angry River* are among my early works written especially for children and their popularity has increased over the years.” Mr. Bond pointed out that when *The Blue Umbrella* was published in the United States, it was named the Book of the Month by Parenting magazine. The new title, ‘The Blue Umbrella’ Stories by Ruskin Bond, will serve to acquaint young children with the world of Ruskin Bond.

Australia abandoned me: Assange

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange said he decided to seek political asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy here because his own country, Australia, had effectively “abandoned” him. He told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Radio on phone that though Ecuador was sympathetic to his struggle, he had no idea if his bid would succeed. He said Australian Attorney-General Nicola Roxon had refused “reasonable requests” by his lawyer to consult or be involved in discussions on the matter. This amounted to an “effective declaration of abandonment.” His mother Christine told the BBC: “My government is not my government any more. It’s just a subsidiary of the United States....”

Swedish major IKEA gears up for India foray

In one of the biggest foreign direct investment (FDI) initiatives, Swedish home furnishing major IKEA has proposed a whopping Rs.10,500-crore (1.5 billion euro) investment to set up 25 stores under the single-brand retail category. IKEA Group, which manufactures and sells home and office furnishing products, proposes to invest in single-brand retail trading in India through a 100 per cent subsidiary. This will be the largest investment in single-brand retailing ever since the government has allowed FDI in this sector in January 2012.

Cement firms may be in for more trouble

Cement companies, which were slapped a fine of Rs.6,307 crore by the Competition Commission of India (CCI), may face more problems with an old case filed against them with the erstwhile monopoly watchdog MRTPC coming up for decision soon before the CCI. An indication to this effect was given by the CCI in its order imposing a fine of Rs. 6,307 crore on 11 cement companies for arbitrary price fixing under the Competition Act.

Harish Bhat is new CEO of Tata Global

Tata Global Beverages, announced the induction of Cyrus P. Mistry, Deputy Chairman, Tata Sons, as a director on its board. Harish Bhat has been appointed Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director of the company. He will take over from Percy Siganporia, who retires on June 30, 2012. The release also said that Darius Pandole had joined the company as an independent director. He is a partner at New Silk Route Advisors, a private equity firm focussed on investing in India and other Asian economies.

Airbus planning to house its innovation cell in Bangalore

Global aircraft manufacturer Airbus aims to source \$1 billion worth of equipment and services from its Indian entities by 2020, said Kiran Rao, Executive Vice-President, Sales and Marketing and Customer Affairs, Airbus. The company, which already sources software and engineering services from its facility in Bangalore, is setting up an innovation cell, which will be operational by the end of the year. Airbus' pilot training centre in Noida would be operational by 2013. India, Dr. Rao said, was the company's fourth most important market, after China, the U.S. and the U.K. Indian commercial airliners were likely to purchase 1,043 aircraft over the next 20 years.

Microsoft rejigs Azure to take on Amazon

Microsoft Corporation officially threw down the gauntlet, right at the feet of Amazon's web services, launching a revamped version of its cloud services platform and simultaneously hosting a software developer meet in Bengaluru. The 'Azure' online platform was first released in 2010, marketed as 'platform as a service' which provides the underlying software and hardware that allow web developers to build applications with little need for expenditure. However, the newly-updated 'Azure' cloud service includes a type of model pioneered by Amazon, which is known as 'infrastructure as a service'. It involves a procedure whereby the consumer rents rather than buys the hardware for computer processing and data storage, along with the Internet bandwidth to host it.

Kaneria found guilty of match-fixing

Former Pakistan leg-spinner Danish Kaneria was given a life ban from English cricket for his involvement in the Mervyn Westfield spot-fixing case, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB). Westfield was given a five-year ban, although he will be able to play club cricket in the final two years of his suspension. Kaneria has been found guilty of two corruption charges of encouraging former Essex teammate Mervyn Westfield not to play to the best of his ability. Paceman Westfield was sentenced to four months in prison in February for spot-fixing offences in 2009.

Humpy emerges joint winner

India's Koneru Humpy and Anna Muzychuk of Slovenia shared the title in the FIDE Women's Grand Prix chess at Kazan, Russia. They finished with 7.5 points from 11 rounds in the round-robin tourney, fourth in a series of six. In the final round, the third-seeded Humpy defeated Russia's Alisa Galliamova, while the No. 2 seed Muzychuk beat another Russian, Nadezhda Kosintseva. Viktorija Cmilyte of Lithuania had to settle for a draw, with Antoaneta Stefanova of Bulgaria, and thus ended with seven points, the same as World champion and top seed and World champion Hou Yifan of China, who authored a remarkable comeback in the final stages of the 12-player tournament.

BAI to honour Saina Nehwal

The Badminton Association of India (BAI) has decided to present Saina Nehwal with a cheque for Rs. 10 lakh for winning the Thailand Open and Indonesia Open titles. BAI president Akhilesh Das announcing the award.

India wins kabaddi gold

Indian women won the gold in kabaddi by defeating Thailand 54-25 in the final of the third Asian Beach Games being held in Haiyang (China), according to Mr. K. Jagadishwar Yadav, Chef de Mission. The Indian team comprising Marshal Mary, Mamata, Priyanka, Priyanka Negi, Kavita Devi and Randeep Kaur led 27-12 at the break. Earlier, India won the gold in women's basketball and bronze in men's kabaddi.

Indian men's team qualifies

The Indian men's team, comprising Jayanta Talukdar, Tarundeep Rai and Rahul Banerjee, has qualified for the London Olympics sealing one of the three team quota places available from the final Olympic qualifying tournament at Ogden (US). The Indian trio showed remarkable courage and determination in downing Norway 224-207 in the pre-quarterfinals, Canada 224-216 in the quarterfinals and Australia 221-209 in the semifinals. This last victory placed India in the final, thus clinching one of the three berths. In the final, India lost to Japan 218-221. Chinese Taipei was the third team to make it apart from Japan and India.