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Approved by:

Chad R. Russell

U.S. Embassy, FASNEWDELHI

Prepared by:

A. Govindan, V. Shunmugam

Report Highlights:

India may miss US meet on WTO talks, *Focus on Indo-US tie-up in farm sector*,
Australia mulling import of Indian mangoes, *Over-regulation threat to biotech: FICCI*,
*Government to free curbs on biotech pharma and food products - move aimed at boosting
domestic biotech research and business*, *Task force wants replacement for GM crop
technology*, *Bt cotton hits more fields*.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
New Delhi [IN1]
[IN]

Welcome to Hot Bites from India, a weekly summary of issues of interest to the U.S. agricultural community. The report includes information that has been garnered during travel within India, reported in the local media, or offered by host country officials and agricultural analysts. Press articles are included in this report. Significant issues will be expanded upon in subsequent reports from this office.

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INDIA MAY MISS US MEET ON WTO TALKS

India is unlikely to attend a ministerial meeting convened by US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick to break the deadlock on WTO negotiations. Commerce Minister Arun Jaitley, who received an invitation from Zoellick for the meeting in London during end April, expressed his difficulties in attending the meeting because of the ongoing national elections. However, he may consider a whistle-stop tour on April 30 to participate in the meeting if there is some forward movement in agriculture negotiations at Geneva before the meeting. (Source: Business Standard, 04/19/04)

Post Comment: Later reports say that Mr. Arun Shourie, Minister for Telecom and Disinvestments is likely to attend this meeting.

FOCUS ON INDO-US TIE-UP IN FARM SECTOR

New generation reforms to restructure and open the economy are needed to integrate India more fully into the global marketplace, according to the United States Ambassador to India, Mr. David C. Mulford. Addressing a session on "US – India Partnership: Creating Economic Opportunities in Agriculture", organized by the Confederation of Indian Industry at Chandigarh, Mr. Mulford emphasized that food and agriculture would form a critical part of the expanding trade and investment between the two countries. "India and the US could be the world's two largest economies," he said, expressing his commitment to lift the strategic US-India partnership to a higher plane of a comprehensive alliance. (Source: The Hindu, 04/17/04)

Post Comment: The Ambassador's Agriculture Orientation trip to Punjab was organized by the Office of Agricultural Affairs with cooperation and support from other sections of the Mission. His comment about the trip was, "With agriculture being such an important part of the Indian ethos (economically, socially and politically), the trip was extremely valuable from an educational perspective as well. I came away with much to reflect on for the future."

AUSTRALIA MULLING IMPORT OF INDIAN MANGOES

Australia is considering allowing imports of Indian mangoes. "We have been holding talks with Australian officials. Even recently, we discussed the issue with the Australian Ambassador," according to Mr. K.S. Money, Chairman, Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority. According to some sources, Australia is looking for a quid pro quo arrangement to allow import of Indian mangoes linking it to market access for its lamb meat and apples to India. (Source: Business Line, 04/17/04)

OVER-REGULATION THREAT TO BIOTECH: FICCI

Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) mentioned that the multiple and over-regulation of Indian biotechnology industry poses a serious hurdle to the

growth of the sector. To spur increased expansion, FICCI, which forms a part of the national task force on biotechnology constituted by the Prime Minister, suggests formulation of a national biotech policy, a biotech fund, and a single-window clearance process for approving biotech products. The biotech committee of FICCI also recommends harmonization of various laws in the country, effective protection of intellectual property rights, and creating awareness among politicians and bureaucrats on the existing regulatory mechanism to encourage biotech research and investment in the country. (Source: Economic Times 4/17/04)

GOVERNMENT TO FREE CURBS ON BIOTECH PHARMA AND FOOD PRODUCTS – MOVE AIMED AT BOOSTING DOMESTIC BIOTECH RESEARCH AND BUSINESS

The Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) has set up a high-level group, including strong industry participation, to find ways to rationalize regulation of biotech pharma products. As reported locally, the GEAC despite its mandate to review regulation of pharma biotech is also expected to opine on regulation of genetically modified foods and food products that might also be reviewed in the near future. Sources in the Ministry of Environment and Forests were quoted that the purpose of the move is to avoid the multi-layered regulatory processes that are found to be hindering biotech research and business. (Source: Economic Times 4/20/04)

TASK FORCE WANTS REPLACEMENT FOR GM CROP TECHNOLOGY

The Swaminathan Committee was constituted to recommend a streamlined national approach for evaluating and approving for commercialization genetically modified crops. After much deliberation, it recommends the GEAC, India's apex biotech regulatory authority which is part of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, to be replaced by an autonomous Indian Biotechnology Regulatory Authority. The taskforce is of the view that this will help avoid unwarranted delays, and lengthy and cumbersome procedures. While recommending putting biotech research on a fast track, the Committee for the first time recommends creation of no-GM zones to protect biodiversity in ecologically sensitive areas. This, according to the taskforce, is being done to maintain geographically identified crops important for exports markets, such as basmati rice, Darjeeling tea, and soybean. It has also suggested an insurance scheme for costlier transgenic crops. (Source: Times of India 4/15/04)

BT COTTON HITS MORE FIELDS

The GEAC in its meeting on April 15, 2004, gave its nod for large-scale field trials and seed production for 12 varieties of Bt cotton developed by Rasi Seeds, Ankur Seeds, and Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Company (Mahyco), all incorporating Cry 1ac gene developed by Monsanto. This includes three varieties each developed for north and south India, and six varieties for central India. In the same meeting, the GEAC also decided that large-scale field trials for transgenic cotton would be conducted in 80 representative locations per genotype, per zone.

At present there are no approved Bt cotton varieties for north India. Last year Monsanto-Mahyco asked for approval for a Bt cotton variety, which was rejected by the GEAC as the variety in question was susceptible to the leaf curl virus prevalent in north India. (Source: Indian Express and Financial Express 4/16/04)

Post Comment: Approval for large-scale trials and seed production is the last regulatory stage before the GEAC decides whether to commercialize a biotech product.

RECENT REPORTS SUBMITTED BY FAS/NEW DELHI

REPORT #	SUBJECT	DATE SUBMITTED
IN4035	Weekly Highlights & Hot Bites, #14	04/14/04
IN3037	Wheat Update - April	04/21/04

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