
Open Window

A community run news magazine

Issue: 15 January 2008

Follow Up 2

Covering the elections in Gujarat 2

How to cash in on a warming planet 2

National News 2

Tata hopes to change the car market of India 2

SC says no to deletion of word 'socialist' from Constitution 5

Hotel Industry included under Factories Act 5

President, Vice-President, Governors get a big pay hike 6

International News 6

One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) Project 6

No Respite from Financial Crisis in US 7

Special Feature 7

An Study Finds Vaccine Preservative Is Not Linked to Risks of Autism 7

News Snippets 8

This is a newsletter by the people for the people. It is based on the idea that the people have to take active interest in the news if they want to get unbiased, unmotivated and balanced news. The news in Open Window is contributed, managed and edited by the readers.

If you like it, become a contributor. If not, still become a contributor – to make it better.

To contribute send a mail to vaishviki@gmail.com with 'Contribute' in the subject line.

For a list of contributors, please visit

<http://vaishviki.blogspot.com>

Some of the articles in the newsletter may have content taken from freely available sources, and those contents are copyrights of their respective owners. The complete list of sources is available at

<http://vaishviki.blogspot.com>

Follow Up

Covering the elections in Gujarat

Chennai, Jan 14 (PTI) Attributing the BJP's victory in the just concluded Gujarat assembly elections mainly to a larger turnout of women, Chief Minister Narendra Modi said he had organized several conferences two months prior to the polls, to address their problems. There was a three per cent increase in the women voter turnout." This is one of the major reasons for the success of the party," Modi said when asked about the reasons for the electoral triumph. Addressing BJP workers here, Modi said he had taken systematic steps to address the problems of various sections - women, youth and farmers -- in the prosperous western state.

How to cash in on a warming planet

Riding high on its achievements, the Delhi Metro has added another feather in its cap when it became the first railway project in the world to be registered by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. This feat would help financially by earning carbon credits, which is measured in terms of reduction of carbon dioxide by adequate measures. "This is the first time in the world that the UNFCCC has registered a project based on regenerating braking technology (RBT)," DMRC Chief Public Relation Officer Anuj Dayal said.

National News

Tata hopes to change the car market of India

Last fortnight, Ratan Tata inaugurated the small car Nano in the automobile expo in New Delhi.

The event was covered with great glam by both Indian and International media.

From the Singur acquisition controversy to the present day, the project has come a long way.

Marketed as the dream car of Ratan Tata, and targeting the urban middle class of India, the project has created both envy, and expectations. Without doubt, the project will have an enormous impact on the bottom-line of Tata Motors and possibly a significant impact on the car ownership pattern of India.

The critics of the project have been many. First, there was intense, but unsustainable, opposition to the land acquisition in Singur where 12000 families were evicted without being given a notice in any meaningful sense and, each family received a lakh in compensation, on an average. Then the CPI(M) West Bengal government was criticized for land acquisition for a private player. The government quoted the archaic 1984 act to tell people that the government does not need to consult with people or obtain their consent before acquiring land.

The critics of the car itself, though not having anything substantial against the car, lament the bad conditions of roads in India and the poor traffic. There is also a fear, expressed by this group that the environmental impact of the small car would be huge.

Tata has tried to allay these fears and has said that the criticism is based on lack of information. The company sources said that the pollution caused by the car is less than that caused by a scooter, and that the car meets the safety norms. It should be obvious to anyone that the car is no doubt safer than a scooter. Also the traffic worry is an absurd reason to oppose Nano. It is well known that private transport is not an answer to the traffic woes of Indian cities and that alternate mass transport arrangements like mono rail, and metro are a must. But, it has been a government policy to encourage car sales. So

as long as government has this policy, those who already have cars (and thus suffer bad traffic on the roads) probably, do not have a right of opposing others in buying a car.

Tata group sees huge potential for its small car venture. Talking about the project's relevance to India's rapidly growing middle class, Mr Ratan Tata said: "If you could position an all-weather car that was not a glorified scooter or a stripped down car, then I believe there would be a market potential for one million cars a year."

In a departure from tradition with regard to automobile dealership and marketing, the company plans small satellite units, with low breakeven points, where some cars could be assembled, sold and serviced.

Touching on the social dimension of the project, Mr Tata said the company would encourage local entrepreneurs to invest in these units and train them to assemble the fully knocked down or semi-knocked down components sent to them; this would also do away with the dealer and dealer's margin.

The assembly-cum-retail operation would be combined with low-cost service.

Cutting down on cost, the Tata's small car project would focus on large volumes, using more plastics for the body, replacing welding technology with modern-day adhesives and low-cost assembly. At the centre of the project would be a large volume unit for the manufacture of all high-volume parts.

Reaction of Indian Media

Indian Media has lauded the car in unequivocal terms. While Hindustan Times said, "For the 200,000 visitors at the Auto Expo 2008 in the Capital on Sunday, Hall Number 11 is invariably the first halt, to see the little Tata Nano that has raised aspirations of millions who now see themselves soon owning a car.", other newspapers also

ran stories detailing the enthusiasm of public and the high hopes raised by the car.

International Reaction

While international reaction was of mixed kind, conspicuous were the sarcastic comments by a section of press that seemed to be engaged in knit-picking over issues, not directly linked with Nano.

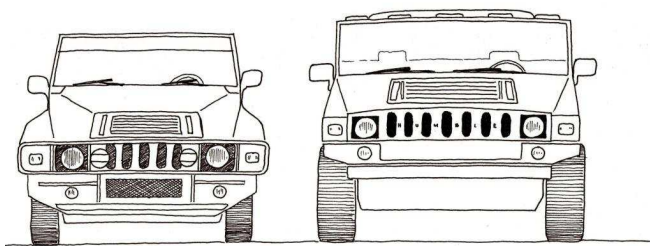
New York times ran headline: "Indians Hit the Road Amid Elephants" and noted that "Not unexpectedly, Indian environmentalists have assailed the car craze, particularly because of the country's relatively relaxed emissions standards and the proliferation of diesel-powered cars.

"Even the usually nonconfrontational chairman of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Rajendra K. Pachauri, has sharply criticized the small car boom, questioning Tata Motors in particular for devoting itself to building cheap cars rather than efficient mass transportation."

Similarly, the Newsweek observed, "Tata's Nano may put millions of new drivers on the roads. It also may herald a new source of pollution."

Even the ceremony was derided in Reuters, "Tata introduced and then drove the car onto the stage in a media circus more worthy of a pop concert or an Oscar ceremony."

HUBRIS, LIKES NOTHING ELSE



"LOOK AT THAT CHEAP NEW THIRD WORLD CAR. SOON IT WILL BE JOSTLING FOR SPACE WITH ELEPHANTS ON THE ROADS."

"YEAH, AND IT WILL BE DUMPING CARBON DIOXIDE INTO THE AIR AND COMPETING FOR OIL."

JKC

Taiwan's Ecooter

Taiwan's Industrial Technology Research Institute has designed a concept car, named "Ecooter", which is a four-wheel transporter designed for two persons, the driver and a passenger behind. It is only 1.1m wide (slimmer than regular cars with a width of 1.7m), 2.45m long and 1.5m high. James Wang, director of ITRI's Intelligent Mobility Technology Division, says that the Ecooter sports a removable battery and fast charging mode which recharges 80 percent of the battery's capacity in 15mins. A completely charged battery can take the vehicle over 100km, with a top speed of 65kph.

Ecooters specs are aimed more towards being eco-friendly than saving cost. The concept car features LED headlights and taillights, wireless communication and navigation. Instead of the traditional rearview mirror, the car features two cameras to give a clear and complete picture with no dead spots. A camera is also located in front to provide a clearer picture of road conditions ahead.

The ITRI MSL team spent 22 months to transform the Ecooter from a concept into a real product. Now the Ecooter is waiting to go from prototype to production.

Remembering Singur

On Jan. 21, 2007, Tata Motors had notional beginning of construction work on its Rs 1,000-crore small car plant in Singur at Hooghly district, which has been mired in protests and agitations for the past couple of months. There was a large police presence in the area. The district administration had extended the period for prohibitory orders under Section 144 CrPC, which was first imposed on the area on November 30.

A Tata Motors release said that the company had taken "initial preliminary steps for the construction of the small car plant with the consent of the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation."

The company claimed that through contractors and sub-contractors it will deploy "appropriate and necessary" local people in various unskilled and skilled assignments. It also said that it had already taken steps to train people from the area for association with the project and that it was also organising groups of women from affected Singur families to supply food to the construction workers.

Location hunting - Tatas chose the site

Referring to the choice of Singur as the location for this greenfield car plant, the Tata Group Chairman said: "East India has been industrially ignored. Therefore I decided to locate the plant in West Bengal so more investment could flow in the region. It was a big leap of faith for us. This project will definitely improve the quality of life in the entire Hooghly district where the new plant is located." While there appears to be no difference of opinion in principle about the need for development of industries in West Bengal, the Tata project's location has stirred up a controversy. The State government has pointed out that the Tatas made the final choice of the site from among five or six sites, including some in backward districts, presented to them.

Critics of the project were upset about double-cropped land being given away for industrial purposes. But according to the (revised) official statistics, out of the total project area of 997.11 acres, 910.61 acres is mono-cropped and only 39.08 acres is under more than one crop. The rest of the land is non-agricultural.

At a press conference, Ravi Kant, the MD of Tata Motors pointed out that some of the proposals from other States were more to the advantage of the company, "but Mr. Ratan Tata has a soft corner for West Bengal and therefore we are here". In May, 2006, it was known that project of Tata Motors is almost certain to be located in West Bengal.

The Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, told reporters after the Managing Director of Tata Motors, Mr Ravi Kant, called on him at the State Government headquarters of Writers' Buildings here on Friday. "It is final," Mr Bhattacharjee told newsmen when asked if it had been finalised that West Bengal had been chosen as the site for the proposed small car project of Tata Motors.

Other major investments of the Tata Group in West Bengal include the Hooghly Metcoke plant in Haldia, Tata

Metaliks pig iron plant in Kharagpur and the Tata Bearings plant, also in Kharagpur.

Compensation Details.

As reported in the national media, by the end of the first week of December 2006, more than 9,000 people had received the compensation.

The beneficiaries also include sharecroppers - 300 registered and 170 unregistered - who are entitled to 25 per cent of the compensation due to the land owners. Senior Trinamul Congress leader Sougata Roy lamented the inadequacy of this compensation. Veteran peasant



leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Benoy Konar, indicated that this amount was more than generous for those having average holdings of 10 decimals of land. In an article in the Bengali daily Ganashakti (December 6), he furnished facts and figures to show that the compensation amount, if kept in fixed deposits in commercial banks, would earn for land-losers 10-15 times the earnings

from their cultivation.

The total compensation payable is Rs 119 crore to approximately 12,000 people. On an average that means that each family got approximately Rs one lakh. The compensation package for farmers is another bone of contention. The State government says that keeping in view similar compensation awarded under the Land Acquisition Act of 1894, it is generous. For land under a single crop, the rate is Rs.6 lakhs an acre; taking into account the solatium and the 10 per cent incentive, the final rate works out to Rs.8.40 lakhs an acre. For land under more than one crop, the rate is Rs.12 lakhs an acre.

Status report on land acquisition in Singur

On Jan. 2, 2007, the West Bengal Government released a status report on land acquisition in Singur providing details of the land acquired, chronology of land acquisition and payment of compensation to landowners and `bargadars'.

The status report enumerated in detail the important provisions of the Land Acquisition Act 1894, the "meaning of consent", the pre-award and post-award consents to amount of compensation, declaration of award and possession, mutation and conversion of the acquired lands and compensation that has been paid.

According to the report, a total of 997.11 acres of land spread across five `mouzas' in Singur, district Hooghly, has been acquired as on December 31, 2006. The process of land acquisition in Singur began with the publication of notifications under Section 4 of the Land

Acquisition Act 1894 from July 20, 2006 onwards and was completed with the Declaration of Awards under Section 11 of the Act on September 23 and 25, 2006. Payment of compensation in accordance with the award began on September 25, 2006. The status report mentions that the "Act does not have any provision for the Collector to obtain individual consent of landowners to the acquisition nor is there any prescribed form for consent to acquisition".

It adds that the State Government, "vide Govt Order No. 1703-LA-3M-07/06 Dated 6 June, 2006, made provision for consent award under Section 11 (2) of the Act, and prescribed the form in which such consents are to be submitted".

It also states that "consent under Section 11(2) is a means of involvement of the citizen in determination of award. However, non-submission of consent in writing in terms of Section 11(2) does not prevent the Collector from declaring the award and acquiring the land... Not accepting the compensation after declaration of award for any part of land does not mean that the land for that part will not be vested in the Government".

Opposition to the project

I will continue with the hunger strike and "see the matter to the end," said Trinamool chief, Mamta Banarjee at the height of the Singur controversy.

Opposition to the project has been without substantial leadership. Mamata Banerjee left no stone unturned to stop the project from taking off. She found an ally in Medha Patkar who also went on sympathy fast but aborted after unsuccessful attempts to visit Singur. The major agitators, however, were members of the Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI), a group with local influence, and naxalite student leaders. The Congress was ambivalent as usual. Initially throwing its weight behind Mamata's agitation, it turned wary when visiting BJP president Rajnath Singh got a warm reception from the Trinamul Congress, his NDA ally.

Leaders of the State Congress later appealed to Ms. Banerjee to call off her strike. A motley group of notable personalities, including Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee, who is a principal opponent of the State government, Gandhian social activist Medha Patkar, some retired and disgruntled civil servants, and even a small section of the Left Front, appears to have strong reservations about different aspects of the project.

Size of acquisition - Details of the project

The mother plant would require 640 acre and the vendor park 290 acre. Already, nearly 55 vendors have agreed to come to Singur, with a promised investment of Rs 2,200 crore.

This is in addition to the Rs 1500-crore investment to be made by Tata Motors at the plant.

To speed up construction work, Tata Motors would switch from two-shift to three-shift operations, he said.

Initial target is 2.5 lakh cars in the first year of operation. The proposed plant is expected to generate employment for 2,000 people directly and 10,000 people indirectly. Construction work on the 250,000 unit plant, which is expandable to 350,000, is going on in full swing, officials added.

High Hopes

Ravi Kant, managing director of Tata Motors, said this project will "kick-start" the re-industrialisation process of West Bengal. In Pune, the whole landscape has changed within three years of setting up our plant." May be he was over-projecting the role of Tatas in the development of Pune, there is no denying the fact that, for government of west Bengal, the project has been very important. For the Tatas also, this is a precious project as the world is watching its experiment of bringing out the cheapest and most fuel-efficient car.

As Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee put it, "The project will change the face of not only Singur, but also of the whole of West Bengal."

Addressing a massive rally in Kolkata on December 3, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee appealed to those opposing the project to revise their stand. "It is not a matter of opposing the State government any longer; the project involves the very future of the State... There can be no going back, especially now that the people have given us the mandate to go forward. There cannot be any progress without industry and commerce," he said.

Employment Generation - Training the people

On Jan. 4, 2007 Tata Motors said it has selected a group of 11 trainees from Singur villages for 6-months training, according to a press release from the company.

The 11 trainees, all of whom have in the past attended Government-run Industrial Training Institute courses, have been selected out of the 21 candidates who responded to Tata Motors' initiative and appeared for a written test and interview held on December 25, 2006, at Singur.

It will involve the setting up of first-tier ancillary units that Tata Motors itself will bring in to supply components.

SC says no to deletion of word 'socialist' from Constitution

"WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC and....."

These are the opening lines of preamble of the Constitution of India. This in essence declares the values which are at the core of Indian democracy. There was a PIL seeking direction to delete the word "socialist" from the preamble of the Constitution on the ground that it was originally not there and adding the word amounted to re-writing it. Defining socialism as a means of public welfare, the Supreme Court on 8th January rejected this plea.

"Why do you take socialism in a narrow sense defined by communists? In broader sense, it means welfare measures for the citizens. It is a facet of democracy," a three judge Bench headed by Chief Justice K G Balakrishnan observed. "It hasn't got any definite meaning. It gets different meaning in different times," the Bench observed.

However, it agreed to hear the PIL which also sought to

Beyond the first-tier ancillary units will be the second-tier units in the small and medium sector (SME), with forward and backward linkages, mostly run by local entrepreneurs and employing local workforce. These SME units are expected to be the largest provider of employment.

As a part of rehabilitating the PAP, the State government has organised a four-month training course for land-losers to impart skills as machinists, in welding, repairing two- and three-wheelers and automobiles, wiring of houses and repairing of electrical gadgets.

For women, the government has entered into agreements with Singer India Ltd for tailoring lessons and already 80 women have enrolled in two batches. The Institute of Hotel Management, Catering Technology & Applied Nutrition will also start a course in catering for women soon. Moreover, Tata Motors has pledged to procure consumables such as gloves and aprons locally from women's self-help groups.

Already more than 1,800 people, including land-losers and 443 landless persons, have enlisted for the training programmes. Agencies such as the Confederation of Indian Industry (Eastern region) and G4 Security Agency have evinced interest in training people as masons, machinists and security guards. The entire training cost would be borne by the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation (WBIDC).

Community development work in the region has also started in earnest. Programmes undertaken include increasing drinking water facilities, repairing school buildings, improving roads, re-excavating the Jhulka canal to improve irrigation potential in the adjoining areas and digging tubewells to improve the cropping intensity in the surrounding region. All this work is being executed with local labour comprising land-losers and landless workers. More than 2,000 man-days have been generated as of the first week of December. The task of fencing the area was also given to the local people, which generated more than 5,500 man-days.

strike down the provision of Representation of People Act (RPA) requiring a political party to adhere to socialism for being recognized. The Bench, also comprising Justices R V Raveendran and J M Panchal, will look into the issue of derecognizing political parties which have wrongly shown allegiance to socialism in their manifesto despite their contrary objectives.

The Court after hearing the contention of the petitioner issued notices to the Centre and the Election Commission.

"It is contrary to the Constitution and to its democratic foundations that political parties be called upon to swear allegiance only to a particular mindset or ideology," senior advocate Fali S Nariman, appearing for petitioner, Kolkata-based NGO Good Governance India Foundation. (PTI)

Hotel Industry included under Factories Act

The Ministry of Labor and Employment has decided to include the 'Hotel Industry' under the Factories Act. the rulebook of all the leading hotels would need a relook.

"Hotel industry will have to work in a disciplined way with the inclusion of the industry under the 'Factories Act'. The Act clearly says that the employees will work for eight hours in a shift and overstaying period will be paid and they have to do it," said a high-level official in the Labor Ministry.

"It is not only the time frame or shifts but the Industry will also probably have to look at the employee's issues relating to health, safety, welfare facilities, working hours, employment of young persons and annual leave with wages which is all a part of 'Factories Act' with the inclusion," confirmed a Ministry source. (PTI)

President, Vice-President, Governors get a big pay hike

A Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has taken decision on 10th January to increase the salaries of President and some other holders of Constitutional offices and it will be with retrospective effect from January one last year. Announcing the

International News **One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) Project**

In the first week of January 2008, Intel announced to pull out of OLPC project. OLPC aimed to boost learning in poorer nations via a custom-built laptop intended to cost no more than \$100.

History of OLPC Project

XO embodies the theories of constructionism first developed by MIT Media Lab Professor Seymour Papert in the 1960s, and later elaborated upon by Alan Kay, complemented by the principles articulated by Nicholas Negroponte in his book, *Being Digital* in 1995. The idea of \$100 laptop was first presented in 2005 by Negroponte at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, where the political, economic, and cultural elite of the world gather each year. The idea was well received and Google, AMD, Red Hat, News Corp among others joined hands to design the laptop. The XO or OLPC laptop was designed specifically for children and was made rugged to cope with conditions in developing nations and could be kept powered using a hand crank.

While initial aim was for a laptop costing only \$100, the final versions that have been trialed in Nigeria and Uruguay cost \$188. Costs were supposed to be kept low by governments ordering the XO laptop in shipments of one million, but large orders for the XO laptop have, so far, not materialized.

Conflict with Intel and Microsoft

The project has been a lightning rod for controversy largely because the world's most powerful software and

Open Window

Cabinet decision, Information and Broadcasting Minister P R Dasmuni said the hike was necessitated since the Vice President, who is the Presiding Officer of the Rajya Sabha, was getting less than Members of Parliament. The MPs got a salary of Rs 68,000.

The President will now get Rs one lakh each month while the Vice-President's salary will be Rs 85,000. For the Governors of 28 states, the salary will be Rs 75,000. It was not immediately clear whether the Lieutenant Governors of the seven Union Territories will also benefit from the pay rise. The President, whose salary was last hiked in 1996, was getting Rs 50,000 while the Vice-President's pay was Rs 40,000. Governors used to get Rs 36,000. Former Presidents' emoluments were also doubled to Rs six lakh a year, while additional facilities were sanctioned for the spouses of late Presidents and Vice Presidents.

Dasmuni said the decision to increase the salary had been taken last year itself, but since the then President and Vice President were retiring, it was deferred.

chip making companies — Microsoft and Intel — had long resisted the project, for fear, according to many industry executives, that it would compete in markets they hoped to develop.

After several years of publicly attacking the XO, Intel reversed itself and joined the organization's board in July 2007, agreeing to make an \$18 million contribution and begin developing an Intel-based version of the computer. Although Intel made an initial \$6 million payment to One Laptop, the partnership was troubled from the outset as Intel sales representatives in the field competed actively against the \$200 One Laptop machine by trying to sell a rival computer, a more costly Classmate PC.

"OLPC had asked Intel to end our support for non-OLPC platforms, including the Classmate PC, and to focus on the OLPC platform exclusively," said Intel spokesman Chuck Mulloy. "At the end of the day, we decided we couldn't accommodate that request." Prior to Intel's involvement, OLPC founder Nicholas Negroponte criticised the chip firm for what he called its attempts to undermine the project's work. He said Intel was selling its Classmate at a loss to make the XO laptop less attractive. Nicholas Negroponte described the situation as: "It's a little bit like McDonald's competing with the World Food Program."

Former OLPC CTO aims to create \$75 laptop

A "spin-out" from OLPC, the company, Pixel Qi is looking to create a \$75 laptop and trying to advance low-cost computers and power-efficient laptops, mobile phones and other consumer electronics that are sunlight readable, Jepsen wrote on the company's Web site. Jepsen left OLPC two weeks ago to commercialize technologies she invented with OLPC, she said in an e-mail to the IDG News Service at the time. Apatentlists

Jepsen as one of the inventors of a display system optimized for low-power operation.

As CTO, Jepsen was responsible for hardware development for the rugged and power-saving XO laptop. Her departure from OLPC spawned a debate, with critics charging that Jepsen was taking advantage of OLPC's nonprofit inventions for personal gains, but supporters shot back, saying it was the right time for her to leave a sinking ship.

Give One, Get One

In a bid to boost the numbers of laptops available, OLPC ran a "Give One, Get One" program in the US from 12 November to 31 December.

This allowed members of the public to buy two XO machines for \$400 – one laptop for themselves and a second XO laptop would be donated to a child in developing country. OLPC said the success of this had helped it to launch programs in Haiti, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Cambodia, Mongolia, and Afghanistan.

No Respite from Financial Crisis in US

The financial wreck continues to unfold each day as some of the giants report higher losses.

Bloomberg reported that Bear Stearns' CEO James "Jimmy" Cayne might resign as the securities firm's shares languish following unprecedented losses from the collapse of the subprime mortgage market. Board members have been notified by Cayne, 73, that he will step down as CEO and remain chairman of the New York-based company, according to the person, who declined to be identified because the decision isn't public. Before this, Citigroup CEO Charles Prince and Merrill Lynch CEO Stan O'Neal were forced out after the sinking value of assets tied to mortgages eroded earnings. Bear Stearns's fourth-quarter loss of \$854 million was the first in its history and the company's stock dropped 53 percent in New York trading during the past year, more than any Wall Street rival.

While there is little likelihood that these giant financial companies would go down because of the sub-prime crisis, the damage is significant and will take time to heal.

Special Feature

An Study Finds Vaccine Preservative Is Not Linked to Risks of Autism

Autism is a brain development disorder that impairs social interaction and communication, and causes restricted and repetitive behavior, all starting before a child is three years old. This set of signs distinguishes autism from milder autism spectrum disorders (ASD) such as Asperger syndrome. There are a number of lobbies that have claimed that there is modern vaccination is the culprit behind the rise in the autism cases, but nothing conclusive has turned up either way.

Researchers from the State Public Health Department found that the autism rate in children rose continuously in

Open Window

designed for use by children in developing countries. Though the laptop has struggled to find buyers, it has been praised for its environmentally friendly design and innovative display, hardware and networking features.

OLPC has so far shipped around 50,000 XO laptops to North American customers under the "give one, get one" program and more remain to be shipped, Bender said. The number of customers who ordered laptops under the program was not immediately available, but as many as 150,000 units may have been donated through the program.

For success of this project, the volume production is must. And programs like Give One, Get One are aimed at getting the numbers rolling by philanthropic schemes, even when they doesn't look commercially viable for developing nations at the moment. Project has an edge for being the innovator in design and being non-profit in nature. It remains to be seen how the project scales up against competing commercial offerings.

Citigroup reported \$10 billion losses for the quarter ended December 2007. Citigroup plans to announce a writedown of as much as \$24 billion and layoffs that could total as much as 24,000 due to subprime and credit-related losses, CNBC reported on 14 Jan. The plans will be unveiled today by Citigroup's new CEO, Vikram S. Pandit. There is also likely to be a sell off of non-core business in a bid to reduce the size and return to profitability, Mr Pandit indicated.

In November, Citi accepted \$7.5 billion in new capital from the The Abu Dhabi Investment Authority only weeks after its former chief executive officer, Charles Prince, was forced out amid news of the heavy losses related to bad bets on mortgage securities and an ailing housing markets.

Merrill has already begun laying off people, but layoffs will be minimal. Eight hundred people are expected to leave, with a number of employees already heading for the exits because of disappointment at the size of bonuses. Merrill's writedown is expected to be in the neighborhood of \$12 billion to \$15 billion. Merrill Lynch & Co. raised \$6.6 billion by selling preferred shares to a group including the Kuwait Investment Authority and Japan's Mizuho Financial Group Inc. after being battered by losses from subprime crisis.

the study period from 1995 to 2007. The preservative, thimerosal, has not been used in childhood vaccines since 2001, except for some flu shots.

Doctors said that the latest study added to the evidence against a link between thimerosal exposure and the risk of autism and that it should reassure parents that vaccinations do not cause autism. If there was a risk, the doctors said, autism rates should have dropped from 2004 to 2007.

Open Window



One doctor said the focus should be on exploring possible causes of autism, including genetic links.

“Something else must be at play,” said Dr. Geschwind, who had no connection with the study. “And we need to know what that is if we’re really serious about preventing autism.”

The results of the study are in the January issue of *The Archives of General Psychiatry*. The study did not explore why autism cases increased.

Officials say one in 150 American children have autism, higher than other estimates. Researchers say it is unclear whether the increase stems from changes in classifying autism or whether the increase is actual.

News Snippets

Kerala's Kannur registers the largest number of rioting cases

(PTI) Kannur in the Kerala's north had 737 riot cases in 2006 and this is the highest number registered by any police district in the country. The district, a bastion of the Marxists for long, had been witnessing frequent clashes between the activists of CPI(M) and BJP-RSS with both sides claiming to have lost at least 150 cadres each.

A number of political clashes were charged under relevant sections of Indian Penal Code relating to rioting and this is the reason behind this kind of figures, a Kerala government official said.

The majority of the present state leadership of the CPI(M), including state party Secretary Pinarayi Vijayan, hails from Kannur. State Home Minister Kodyeri Balakrishnan also hails from Kannur.