

CSR BULLETIN FOR THE ICT SECTOR



The ASK-Verité ICT Newsletter is a periodic platform created for discussion and sharing of world-wide initiatives, happenings, and viewpoints on the sector's social responsibilities. This issue, Number 3, provides information about the developments taking place in the ICT sector in India, and also offers insight into recent social responsibility initiatives undertaken by a variety of stakeholders on a global scale.

PROGRESS REPORT FROM INDIA: NEWS SUMMARY

This section of the bulletin provides a summary of developments taking place in the Information & Communications Technology (ICT) sector in India and also offers insights into events that are shaping the direction of this sector.

...ON ITES

IRISH PRIME MINISTER LAUNCHES GESCI IN INDIA

<http://www.gesci.org/gesci/publisher/index.jsp?&1nID=97&nID=117&aID=219>

An emerging trend in the education field is to build global e-schools and communities which allow users from a wide variety of locations to interact and share knowledge. Such e-communities are proliferating in India, and recently, Irish Prime Minister, Bertie Ahern, launched a Global E-schools and Communities (GeSCI) program in India, welcoming the commitment to enhance the reach and quality of education through the use of ICT.

Using ICT as a tool, GeSCI is intended to expose India to the best international practices in the field of education. At the launch, two agreements were signed – one with Nasscom (National Association of Software and Service Companies) and one with MAIT (Manufacturers Association of Information Technology) – to provide a collaborative framework for promoting educational and development goals.

Prime Minister Ahern stated that he was looking forward to new partnerships in the knowledge sector for expanding economic and trade ties between the two countries. In India, GeSCI works at the state and national levels, assisting stakeholders, including state governments and private partners, with ICT implementation for educational strategies and programs.

GeSCI is already partnering with the Rajasthan government in association with the World Economic Forum and the CII for improving the northern state's education system. Dialogue with other states, including Karnataka, is underway with the goal of launching additional e-school programs. ■

About ASK-Verité

Founded in 1992, the **Association for Stimulating Know-How (ASK)** is one of the few non-profit organizations in India working extensively in the field of corporate social responsibility. ASK functions as the South Asia Regional Program Office for Verité, undertaking social audits and research on CSR issues and facilitating factory-level remediation and trainings. ASK also supports programs as diverse as finding alternatives for child laborers in the brass industry in India, and working with indigenous communities in rural South Asia.

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Verité is an independent, non-profit social auditing, research, and training organization based in Amherst, Massachusetts, USA. Founded in 1995, the organization helps to improve the lives of workers and assists the corporations that employ these workers to better balance profitability with social responsibility. Verité provides social audits, factory remediation, corporate training, labor research, and worker education in over 60 countries worldwide.

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The **ASK-Verité** partnership undertakes research and capacity building programs focused on India to improve working conditions. We also collaborate to build capacity among corporations globally to assess and remediate factory-level labor problems.

COMPANIES PROVIDE PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP TO LESSEN EMOTIONAL STRESS OF IT WORKFORCE

http://www.financialexpress.com/fe_full_story.php?content_id=131785

According to The Financial Express, a business news periodical based in New Delhi, excessive work hours and efforts to meet customers' deadlines are leading to both physical and psychological problems for workers sustaining the IT sector in India. As a result, in addition to tending to employees' physical well-being, organizations have also begun to recognize the need for emotional support via psychological counseling. According to the Express, emotional stress caused by time-critical projects, fluctuating work patterns, job insecurity, and shift work contribute to employees' increasing irritability and poor decision making, as well as a lack of concentration that contributes to workplace mistakes and accidents. Increasingly, IT companies are finding it necessary to engage dedicated counselors to address stress management. ■

WORK ENVIRONMENT VITAL TO MANAGE ATTRITION

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2006/04/29/stories/2006042901790400.htm>

The Chairman of Satyam Computers, senior Human Resources professionals, and consultant and management gurus recently converged in Hyderabad to address current, pressing Human Resources concerns in the BPO sector. Given the backdrop of growing levels of attrition and a shortage of employable, skilled talent, the parties concluded that the best way to address the demand-supply mismatch must include an investment in building workers' soft and intangible skills, and improving value systems and work culture. HR consultants also identified the need to combat what is perceived to be a growing, self-centric ideology amongst the workforce. A work environment where every individual employee is seen and treated as a leader was also identified as a critical element in building better organizations. ■

INTERVIEW WITH THE HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR OF XCHANGING TECHNOLOGIES

Xchanging is the process of using contracted ICT businesses to manage customer service, human resources, procurement, finances, and accounting for businesses populating the financial, insurance, manufacturing, and retail sectors. Xchanging Technology Services (India) Pvt., Ltd. plays a critical role in delivering Xchanging services including providing strategic IT solutions and business processing services to global customers. Xchanging Technology Services employs a workforce of over 350 people in its Bangalore and Gurgaon offices, as well as 3,500 workers placed in offices located throughout the world.

A recent interview with Xchanging Technology Services captures some of the innovative HR practices adopted by the company to combat attrition rates in the ICT industry – an increasingly critical area of concern.

Q. What is the attrition rate in your company?

A. At present, the attrition rate is nearly 20 percent. For other Business Processing Companies, it varies from 20-40 percent.

Q. Where is the attrition level generally most severe?

A. The attrition level at the senior management level is negligible, at the middle management level, also, it is more stable, but at the lowest level, it [the attrition rate] is the highest. Most of these are persons who leave before completing one year with the company. Those who continue for more than a year tend to stay longer.

Q. Do you have a system of maintaining data on attrition rates?

A. Yes we have a matrix report that comes out every month. This report is prepared by our quality department that is a warehouse of all the information. The report gives a trend analysis of how many people came in, through what source, how much time it took to recruit the persons, how much time they spent in the company, cost entailed, and trend analysis.

Q. What skills do you look for in an individual while recruiting?

A. We select both newcomers and experienced people in our company, both at the BPS side and the IT side. For the IT jobs, we look to recruit people with specialized skills. In order to select the best talent, we have five rounds of interviews. The first is the aptitude test, followed by a technical test, technical interview, HR interview, and an interview by the head of the concerned department. All the interviews are conducted on the same day in order to prevent any kind of inconvenience to anybody. The candidates are also provided with free lunch during the course of the interviews.

Q. What measures does the company adopt to ensure retention?

A. The HR department is a very personalized department where a lot of importance is placed on employee relations. Two employee relations officers have also been appointed for the job, one exclusively for the IT Department and another exclusively for the Business Processing section. Other companies, too, have these employee relations officers, but what makes our model different from others is that other companies may think of having something like this only after they reach workforce strength of a few thousand, whereas, in the case of Xchanging Technologies, these officers are brought on board after employee strength reaches just a few hundred. Our core belief is that HR should be involved and available before the problem occurs, rather than the problem coming first, and then the HR Department getting involved.

Q. Youngsters these days are looking for long-term careers and not just money. How do you ensure that?

A. We have an Employee Development Program. Under this program, depending on the training needs of people, employees are given training on a variety of issues. The training schedule is set for every three months and is made available to all the employees. After the end of each training, employees are given a certificate of completion. Besides this, the company also believes in the philosophy that all management is self-management and all development is self-development. Therefore, if any employee comes up with a request that is in line with his/her career development and growth plans, he/she is encouraged to go ahead with it.

BIHAR APPROACHES TO E-GOVERNANCE MODE

<http://news.webindia123.com>

In an attempt to enhance good governance, the Indian state of Bihar has begun to invest in the model of E-Governance. E-governance promotes the improved performance of governance via electronic mediums which facilitate the dissemination of information to the public and other agencies. At the end of May, the state capital of Bihar embraced new modes of E-Governance when it connected nine divisional headquarters through video-conferencing. State Chief Secretary K.A.H. Subramanian said that the facility, which was formally launched on May 25, further extended the conferencing to district headquarters in 37 state districts by May 31. In addition to connecting district headquarters, Subramanian stated that video-conferencing would assist the state administration leaders with communication amongst themselves, and facilitate regular feedback from district magistrates regarding day-to-day developments related to government schemes. The cost of setting up the facility at the state capital and divisional headquarters is estimated at approximately \$15 million, and the cost of linking each district with the state headquarters is estimated at approximately \$1.5 million. National Informatics Center Network (NICNET) was contracted to set up the infrastructure for the facility. ■

NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON E-WASTE LEGISLATION

<http://www.asemindia.com/events.htm>

A national workshop for preparing a draft on e-waste legislation was organized in Bangalore on May 3rd and 4th 2006. The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests and the German Technical Cooperation organized the two-day national-level workshop. ■

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Q. What are the working hours?

A. The central attraction of our company is the working hours schedule. We start at 9 a.m. and close sharp at 6 p.m. – nobody is encouraged to sit beyond that. Nobody works on Saturdays or Sundays. We provide technical support in case people wish to work from home during the weekends. For those who are involved with UK processes, there is only one shift – from 12-9 p.m.

Q. How do you ensure a good working environment for employees?

A. Xchanging Technologies provides a world-class work environment to its employees across all our locations in the world. We have a recreation room, a cafeteria, and now a state-of-the-art gym is under construction and will be inaugurated on August 31st. Also, there is a virtual library from where they can obtain books.

Q. What are the mechanisms by which you find out why people are leaving?

A. We have a system of exit interviews. The employee relations executive sits with the person to find out what went wrong and what went right. The feedback is conveyed to all those who have been associated with her or him in the organization, and this also affects their performance rating, which includes an empirical rating and a perception rating.

Q. How do you manage stress that an employee may be undergoing due to professional problems?

A. The culture at Xchanging Technologies is very open. Everybody is very clear about their roles and responsibilities. If the employees have any problem, they can go to the HR Department or directly to their line managers – who are well trained to handle such situations.

Q. What should be the ideal grievance handling mechanism in a BPO?

A. The grievance handling mechanism in any BPO should be very strong. At Xchanging Technologies, it goes step-by-step. Any employee having any problem can go to his immediate supervisor. If the issue is not addressed within 48 hours, he or she can go to the next level and so on. We encourage people to open up and give recommendations that are taken into consideration before planning any policy or program.

Q. What other initiative has the company taken to ensure retention?

A. The company encourages internal movements and cross-functional movements, sends people for overseas training for as long as six months, gives a lot of importance to rewards and recognition, provides lunch and transport facilities, organizes inter-company competitions, provides an end-of-the-year bonus, medical insurance, a five-day workweek, and liberal leave policy. We also have a cafeteria committee, a transport committee, and a cultural committee that organize events and outings. ■

INDIAN BPOs LEND A HAND TO THE DISABLED

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1506570.cms>

According to the Times of India, the booming Indian BPO sector is increasingly hiring physically challenged persons. Some companies reported that such hiring decisions are attributable to their sense of social obligation, while others view the hirings more pragmatically, and analysts believe that such hires are an attempt to stem attrition rates. BPO jobs provide particularly conducive work environments for the physically challenged as many jobs primarily require workers to work at their desks. Companies reported that they have partnered with NGOs to find physically challenged job candidates, and some companies have begun to install ramps and accessible toilets for easier and safe access to work space. ■

...ON E-WASTE

EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY – EXEMPTED IN INDIAN IT SECTORby **K.S.Sudhakar**

Toxics Link

<http://www.toxicslink.org/>

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is a series of progressive regulations mandating clean production and take-back by e-based production companies, however, according to K.S. Sudhakar, spokesman for the environmental NGO, Toxics Link, EPR is often a new concept for environmentally noncompliant e-companies based in India. Although some sectors in the Indian IT industry, especially those in the hardware sector, are well aware of EPR due to demands from non-Asian markets, EPR directives such as those issued by the European Union's Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive and the Restriction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS) Directive have put most of the Indian electronics sector on its heels.

Many global IT companies with a strong presence in Indian markets do not practice principles of EPR such as eco-friendly material selection, clean production processes, responsible packaging, consumer education, take back, and recycling. Experts note that Indian e-markets are hesitant to adopt RoHS standards locally and nationally, although they adopt such standards when producing for the European Union as adopting them locally and nationally would have a greater impact on their profit margins.

Experts monitoring Indian IT Companies are increasingly concerned that claims of EPR compliance made by Indian e-companies are misleading and their efforts inadequate. For instance, some companies advertise that their product brochures are made of 50 percent recycled paper and 10 percent post consumer content do not provide information on the environment friendliness of the product itself or the process by which it was manufactured. Some e-companies do not warn consumers of hazardous substances contained in e-waste, and do not instruct consumers in how to dispose of such waste in an acceptable manner. Critics also note that while some major IT firms claim to take part in the post-consumer take-back initiative known as Planet Partners Programs, rather than instituting a material and component recovery and reuse process, IT firms merely send e-waste to scrap markets overflowing with mounds of printers and monitors.

Current concerns regarding the EPR industry in India include the following:

EPR Principles are not Mandated by the Government in India

Because the government has been unsuccessful in implementing EPR in other sectors, environmental policies have been recently dissolved by the government, and the IT sector enjoys a place of particular prestige in India, there is little incentive for, and no legal policy requiring, e-companies to adopt EPR standards. The government has also recently issued decrees that exempt e-manufacturers from EPR standards. For instance, the recently drafted WEEE Guidelines (which remain under consideration) do not address clean production and require very little EPR compliance from producers and manufacturers.

Who Should Pay for EPR Costs

The question of who should pay the price for EPR costs is ongoing. With the current working models providing e-waste recycling services at companies' door steps, consumers question why they should suddenly be responsible for paying take-back fees. With such corporate responsibility models in place, consumers are also reluctant to pay WEEE deposits to authorized dealers. Experts believe that consumers will willingly pay a marginal increase of one to two percent of e-costs if e-production companies will assume responsibility for take-back.

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INDIA'S FIRST E-WASTE DUMP FACES EVICTION

<http://www.dnaindia.com/report.asp?NewsID=1022633&CatID=2>

A joint Indo-German hazardous waste management unit (HAWA), set up to treat and handle e-waste at Dobbespeth, about 45 kms north of Bangalore, has been evicted just a year before it was to become operational. Reasons cited for the eviction include the unit's close proximity to temples and mutts [places of worship], which many feel would harm the sanctity of these religious retreats. Already, approximately Rs. 20 crores (a crore is equal to USD 10 million) had been invested in the plant and machinery for the unit, which would have been ready to treat electronic waste beginning in 2007. The delay violated the ruling passed by the Supreme Court's Monitoring Committee on Hazardous Waste, which requires that every state should have a scientific unit to dispose of hazardous waste by June 2007. ■

INDIA'S WIPRO TO OFFER FREE E-WASTE DISPOSAL

http://www.cio.com/blog_view.html?CID=23049

Under pressure from environmentalists, Indian outsourcer, Wipro, announced that in September 2007, it will offer a free e-waste disposal service to its PC customers. Besides its core business in outsourcing, Wipro also assembles and sells PCs under its brand for the domestic market. According to Ashutosh Vaidya, Vice President of the Personal Computing Division of Wipro of Bangalore, the e-waste disposal offer will cover all Wipro-branded PCs, but will not cover products from other vendors such as computer printers which are sold, but not manufactured, by Wipro. The company has arranged with an undisclosed e-waste processor to handle the PCs that are returned, Vaidya reported. The e-waste processing company is already handling e-waste generated by Wipro's large outsourcing business.

In September 2005, the environmentalist organization, Greenpeace International, dumped 500 kilograms of electronic waste outside of Wipro's Bangalore headquarters. The activists stated that they had collected the scrapped Wipro-branded computers from recycling yards in Delhi, Bangalore, and Chennai. They reportedly targeted Wipro because it is an "iconic" Indian company, and it is hoped that its new adoption of environmentally friendly practices will set a trend for the rest of the PC industry. Wipro also announced Monday that by the middle of 2007, it expects to have components in its PCs that comply with requirements of the European Union's Restriction of Hazardous Substances, which was adopted in February 2003 and took effect in July 2006. The directive restricts the use of six hazardous materials in the manufacture of various types of electronic and electrical equipment. ■

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Why is the IT sector a Primary Target of Criticism

With special status given to the IT sector including tax exemptions, fast track clearances, and infrastructure development, and given that the IT industry enjoys a place of prestige in the Indian economy, many critics argue that using the IT sector as its "poster boy" for EPR responsibility is well justified.

Industry experts take it as a positive sign that one major Indian IT business is taking the first step toward EPR responsibility by committing to take back its products beginning in September 2007. Experts note that such positive and self-initiated steps will serve as a role model for other e-businesses, and their hope is that self-initiated EPR trends will follow in the e-industry. According to EPR critics and leaders, the time has come for Indian e-companies to adopt EPR standards locally and nationally that are willingly adopted for e-production for the European Union and abroad. ■

MILLIONS OF INDIANS AT RISK FROM MERCURY POISONING

<http://www.planetark.com/dailynewsstory.cfm/newsid/36990/story.htm>

According to an environmental group based in New Delhi, millions of people are at risk from the unregulated use of mercury in India – which has become the world's biggest mercury consumer after China. Mercury is a freely-traded commodity in India, as there is no checks and balances system governing its trade or import, and no monitoring of who uses it or what it is used for. Industry is the biggest consumer of mercury, which is often discarded in garbage dumps where children and rag-pickers use their bare hands to sift through waste. Environmental groups note that mercury is a highly toxic metal and millions of people are at risk from poisoning as long as the government fails to implement strict laws regulating its trade, usage, and disposal. ■

...ON IT SOFTWARE

ICT FORUM IN WEST BENGAL – A TRI-PARTITE INITIATIVE

<http://www.csmworld.org/public/programme.htm>

Although it is popular to mention that the Indian ICT sector has helped the country achieve some of its economic targets, lost in the discourse of optimism and hope are serious social development challenges. To address these concerns, a tri-partite initiative of concerned ICT leaders was formed, and a series of forums continues to advance social development initiatives.

In 2004, the Center for Social Markets (CSM) initiated what was to become the ICT Forum when they began discussing social development issues with ICT policymakers, businesses, and members of civil society. During their first formal meeting in 2004, the tri-partite group known as the West Bengal Forum on Business Partnerships for Sustainable Development identified specific social development concerns including workforce employability, e-governance in West Bengal, e-learning, specialized education, gender issues, and small-and-medium enterprise challenges.

Following the commencement of and throughout subsequent meetings, ICT Forum participants have committed their resources to making West Bengal a sector-friendly state not only in terms of infrastructure and tax breaks, but also in terms of upgrading skill sets of graduating students, engaging more women in the industry, and extending IT benefits to regular citizens.

Spurred by the initiative, universities and colleges have agreed to update curriculum and to emphasize soft skills (communication skills, leadership skills, etc.) to enhance the employability of their students. Businesses have offered to provide teaching assistantships to both students and teachers. Businesses become more student-friendly by facilitating internships and placements, and colleges, in turn, receive positive marketing and ensure the employability of their students.

As the government is one of the largest procurers of the IT manufacturing sector, the ICT Forum has urged businesses to encourage the West Bengal government to create an e-governance plan. According to ICT business advocates, plans for West Bengal e-governance should include proper documentation, re-engineering existing e-systems, and creating new e-systems that are established in a sustainable and continuously improving mode. In addition to these changes, advocates note that e-governance must be approached from both the technical and social perspectives such that new e-governed social systems are readied through education and value training.

The ICT Forum also clearly illuminated the need to induct more women into the ICT sector. Forum participants concluded that businesses must ensure female-friendly workplaces by providing sufficient security and benefits, among other issues. The Forum also challenged academia to provide more seats and scholarships to young women, and the government was called to ensure adequate workplace policies that encourage women to consider the ICT profession not just as employees of the industry, but also as entrepreneurs.

The ICT Forum continues to meet up formally and informally to review work-in-progress. ■

NASSCOM NOT FOR JOB QUOTA IN PRIVATE SECTOR

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2006/04/26/stories/2006042602880400.htm>

In a recent move against job quotas in the private sector, Mr. Kiran Karnik, President of apex IT industry body, Nasscom, stated that he does not favor the idea of job reservation. Speaking to reporters, Mr. Karnik said that there was a genuine need to do something for those who are historically disadvantaged [with regard to employment opportunities], but that the best way to end discrimination is to raise the ability of disadvantaged persons to compete. Mr. Karnik further stated that there are many issues that need to be discussed to assist disadvantaged persons with obtaining jobs. Those issues, as elaborated by Mr. Karnik, may include primary education, creating appropriate work environments, and considering language and social cultures. Mr. Karnik stated that he would discuss such issues within the industry before approaching the government with suggestions. ■

WIPRO TO SUPPORT CREDIT COOPERATIVES AUTOMATION PROJECT

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1655728.cms>

The Times of India reports that the Maharashtra Federation of Credit Co-operatives signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Wipro Infotech for a Rs. 100-crore (a crore is equal to USD 10 million) automation project to be implemented from 2006-09. The project includes computerization of all the 28,000 credit co-operatives in the state by 2009, setting up mini ATM facilities, and establishing a national grid of all credit co-operatives. The federation also plans to provide cash and credit card facilities to customers of credit co-operatives who come primarily from rural agrarian communities. The equipment and technical support for the project will be provided by Wipro as part of their social responsibility initiative. ■

DELL OPENS COMMUNITY COMPUTER CENTER

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2006/04/25/stories/2006042502930400.htm>

As part of Dell Corporation's Community Outreach Program, a Dell computer center was inaugurated at the HOPE foundation facility in Hyderabad. Backed by funds from the Dell Foundation, the center is equipped with 30 Dell desktop computers, and will impart computer education to under-served students of the twin cities. Dell, the 56 billion dollar technology corporation, advances community outreach initiatives under the program known as 'Helping You Grow.' The program includes employee engagement initiatives and community support. In 2004, two similar Dell centers were built in schools assisting under-served children. ■

GLOBAL BYTES

This section contains news and views from around the world in order to see the emerging trends, and enhance the global perspectives regarding ICT.

CALIFORNIANS, DON'T BREAK THE LAW – RECYCLE YOUR OLD CELL PHONE

<http://www.pnnonline.org/article.php?sid=6825>

A new law, effective July 1, 2006, requires companies selling cell phones in the state of California to offer a no-cost way for consumers to recycle their old cell phones. As with other environmental issues, California took the lead on the growing e-waste issue and passed the Cell Phone Recycling Act of 2004. RecycleForUS, a national program, was developed so everyone in California and across the nation can participate. Consumers will find convenient locations to drop off their old phone for recycling or print a pre-paid shipping label from their computer. Nonprofit organizations, businesses, and government agencies can collect old cell phones from their members, customers, employees, residents or organizations. Cell phones which cannot be reused will be recycled, with no hazardous materials entering landfills. "It is estimated there are more than 600 million used cellular phones in the U.S., with 140 million additional phones being replaced this year," said Conrad Melancon, president of RMS Communications, developer of the RecycleForUS.com recycling initiative. Besides the obvious economic and environmental benefits, RecycleForUS.com also provides cell phones to people in countries where telephone communications are not well established, with other phones being donated to domestic violence shelters, senior centers or other worthwhile organizations. ■

HP EXPANDS GLOBAL RECYCLING PROGRAM

http://www.greenbiz.com/news/news_third.cfm?NewsID=32804

Hewlett-Packard announced the expansion of its product return and recycling program to reach more customers and create new ways for people to discard used or unwanted electronic equipment in a convenient and environmentally responsible manner. The company is hosting a series of product collection events in the US to raise awareness and increase the rate of electronics recycling among consumers. "Customers are integral to our worldwide commitment to the environment," said John Frey, manager of environmental strategies at HP. "It is critical that we work with communities to explore innovative approaches to electronics recycling, so we can continue to offer the most environmentally responsible solution available while providing our customers with convenient choices." During collection events, customers drop off a broad range of products from any manufacturer at no charge. All products will be recycled at one of HP's approved recycling facilities in the United States. HP is also expanding its product take-back offering throughout Asia Pacific and Japan where the company has aligned its trade-in, refurbishing, and recycling operations to offer full asset-recovery services to commercial customers. These services match existing services offered by HP in Europe and the Americas. Consumer collection programs are also planned for specified locations in Australia, China, and France. HP is on target to meet its global goal to recycle 1 billion pounds of hardware and HP print cartridges by the end of 2007. Since the company began recycling, it has recycled 750 million pounds total. Plastics and metals recovered from recycled products have been used in new HP products, as well as a range of other uses, including auto body parts, clothes hangers, plastic toys, fence posts, serving trays, and roof tiles. ■

HP CONDUCTS TRAINING PROGRAM IN CHINESE SUPPLIERS

<http://www.hp.com/hpinfo/newsroom/press/2006/060601b.html>

In June 2006, Hewlett-Packard launched a year-long training program, Focused Improvement Supplier Initiative (FISI), for management staff of some of its key suppliers in China. The focus of FISI is to provide HP's global suppliers with training to make socially and environmentally responsible improvements, including improving the labor conditions and minimizing health and safety factory risks and progressing towards compliance with the Electronic Industry Code of Conduct (EICC). FISI participants currently attend monthly social and environmental responsibility trainings in the Shenzhen and Shanghai areas, as well as provide monthly progress reports on key business metrics. BSR China Training Institute (CTI) and Verité/WSPE, and other China based training organizations are working with HP on the initiative. ■

MICROSOFT TRAINS CHINESE MIGRANT WORKERS IN ICT SKILLS

<http://www.microsoft.com/about/corporatecitizenship/citizenship/giving/programs/up/casestudies/beijing.asp>

In response to the growing migrant worker population in Chinese cities, Microsoft has partnered with Beijing Xicheng District Library to provide training for these workers, many of whom lack the essential skills needed to be competitive in the urban job market. Microsoft has provided a three-year grant for this program, Unlimited Potential in China, including cash, software, and curriculum to the participating Community Technology Centers (CTC). The CTC offers informal training courses in basic Information and Communication Technology for migrant workers as well as disadvantaged or disabled members of the local community. ■

DELL TO OFFER FREE RECYCLING OF DELL PRODUCTS WORLDWIDE

http://www.greenbiz.com/news/news_third.cfm?NewsID=32822

Dell announced plans to provide free recycling of any Dell-branded product for consumers around the world as part of its new global recycling policy. "We have a responsibility to our customers to recycle the products we make and sell," said Michael Dell, chairman of Dell. "Our direct relationships with consumers allow us to offer this easy and free service and we encourage others in our industry to do so as well." Dell currently offers consumers no-charge recycling of any brand of used computer or printer with the purchase of a new Dell computer or printer. This service includes home pick-up of the used computer at no charge. Under its new policy, Dell will provide consumers no-charge recycling of any Dell-branded product, regardless of whether a replacement product is purchased. The company plans to launch the service in the U.S. by September, and globally by November. It is currently available in Europe. Dell has focused on developing market-driven consumer recycling services for several years. "Dell is setting the standard for the industry with this new policy," said Kate Krebs, executive director of the National Recycling Coalition. "Recycling of used consumer electronics remains a challenge and Dell is taking concrete steps to remove the barriers of cost and inconvenience for consumers." The company expands product recovery services on a country-by-country basis as its share grows. ■

APPLE JOINS EICC

http://www.eicc.info/EICC_SPONSOR.html

In August 2006, Apple announced that it has joined the Electronic Industry Code of Conduct. Apple reports that the EICC was a benchmark in creating the Apple Code of Conduct. ■

Censorship continues to dominate world news. The following series of articles follows charges levied against the world's biggest internet companies and public responses.

YAHOO CHINA IS UNDER FIRE AGAIN- RIGHTS GROUP SAYS IT HELPS AUTHORITIES CONVICT DISSIDENTS

<http://www.marketwatch.com/News/Story/Story.aspx?dist=newsfinder&siteid=google&guid=%7BAF751D08-EE8D-4375-9206-8F9785B37973%7D&keyword=>

A human rights group has revealed that Yahoo's China operation provided a Beijing court with information used to jail a political dissident. Human Rights in China, a New York-based group, said that Wang Xiaoning was sentenced to 10 years in prison in Sept 2003 for "incitement to subvert state power" after Yahoo provided authorities with his email address. Wang allegedly used a Yahoo service to publish articles advocating democratic reform and a multi-party system. "Among the evidence against Wang cited in the judgment is information provided by Yahoo Holdings (Hong Kong) Ltd. stating that Wang's 'aaabbbccc' Yahoo! Group was set up using the mainland China-based email address bxoguh@yahoo.com.cn," Human Rights in China said. Yahoo is no stranger to controversy in China. This is the fourth time the company has been accused of helping authorities jail its users for expressing controversial political views. Nor is it alone in its troubles. Google was stung by criticism in January after it bowed to Beijing's demands that politically sensitive results be censored out of searches on its Chinese site. And Microsoft was accused of shutting down a political blog last December on pressure from authorities. But Yahoo has been the subject of the most frequent, and most serious, accusations. Yahoo's China division was acquired by mainland e-commerce firm Alibaba in October 2005, but continues to operate under the Yahoo brand. When contacted by MarketWatch, Yahoo denied the company was involved in any wrongdoing. "We obey local laws wherever we operate," said Pauline Wong, a Yahoo spokesperson in Hong Kong. She noted that Yahoo's China operations are now run by Alibaba independently of the U.S. and China business. However, all cases under scrutiny took place before the acquisition. Alibaba also denies it is accountable for turning over information of dissidents. "That was prior to our acquisition of Yahoo China so we're not in a position to comment on the details of what may or may not have happened," said Alibaba spokesman Porter Erisman. "If we're approached by the government, we make sure the request complies with the law. If it's a court order, then we follow the law," he said. Reporters Without Borders believes Internet companies won't stand up to Beijing until they have a financial incentive to do so. "The only way to really hit Yahoo and make them change is to get the support of the financial markets," said Julien Pain, who heads the Internet freedom desk at the group's Paris headquarters. "We hope people will stop investing in Yahoo because they fear that in the long run it could damage their financial interests." The group is trying to convince investment funds to avoid companies involved in violations of online political freedoms. So far, 32 funds controlling a total of \$24 billion have signed onto the initiative. ■

LEGISLATION AND CODE OF CONDUCT NEEDED TO ENSURE ETHICAL BUSINESS PRACTICES

<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/china0806/>

Legislation and a strong industry code of conduct are necessary to end the complicity of Western Internet companies in political censorship in China, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today. China's system of Internet censorship and surveillance, popularly known as the "Great Firewall," is the most advanced in the world. The 149-page report, "Race to the Bottom: Corporate Complicity in Chinese Internet Censorship," illustrates how companies, including Yahoo!, Microsoft, Google, and Skype block terms they believe the Chinese government will want them to censor. "Race to the Bottom" demonstrates that within a difficult environment, different companies have been making different choices about where they draw the ethical line, with widely varying results. The report includes examples of blogs by Chinese users outraged by the decisions of these companies. Human Rights Watch called the United States, the European Union and other jurisdictions to pass legislation prohibiting companies from storing personal user data on servers in China. "Laws are needed to end this race to the bottom and establish a level playing field so that the Chinese government can't pick off companies one by one," said Brad Adams, Asia director of Human Rights Watch. "Otherwise the standard set will be that of the company trying the hardest to please the Chinese government." ■

GOOGLE SIGNALS U-TURN OVER CHINESE SITE

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/china/story/0,,1792638,00.html>

Internet giant Google may reverse its decision to launch a censored version of its search engine in China, one of the company's founders has said. Sergey Brin said the company had "felt that perhaps we could compromise on our principles, but provide ultimately more information for the Chinese" with Google.cn, which does not link to results for politically incendiary terms such as "Tiananmen Square" or "Falun Gong," the religious movement banned by the Chinese government. But Mr. Brin said he could consider reversing that decision. "Perhaps now the principled approach makes more sense," he told reporters in Washington. Google was widely accused of ignoring its informal motto, "Don't be evil," in favor of commercial gain when the Chinese service began in January. Campaigners have voiced strong concerns about the conflict between the repressive regime in Beijing and Google's commitment to freedom of information, but representatives for the company have argued that a policy of engagement is more valuable to Chinese internet users than refusing to deal with the authorities. Mr. Brin intimated that Google could now be considering another approach. Google has claimed that Chinese surfers can use its main portal, Google.com, to read material that does not appear on the censored site. But it is thought that Mr. Brin's comments may have been precipitated by reports that the international site has been inaccessible throughout much of China for long periods of time - apparently blocked by the so-called Great Firewall, which prevents access to websites the government deems unsavory. ■

YAHOO CONTINUES TO COMPLY WITH INTERNET CENSORSHIP IN CHINA

<http://www.business-humanrights.org/Links/Repository/668381>

Executives at Yahoo's annual shareholders meeting Thursday turned down a request from the human rights group Amnesty International, which is demanding the world's most visited Web site stop censoring the Internet and referring dissidents to the Chinese government. "If you go to Yahoo China and put the words 'democracy,' 'human rights,' or 'Tiananmen Square' into their search engine the results that come back are totally censored," said Amnesty's Anthony Cruz, who addressed the meeting. During the meeting Yahoo executives said they were concerned about the issue of human rights in China, but that they had no choice but to cooperate. "The choice in China or other countries is not whether to comply with law enforcement demands for information. Rather, the choice is whether or not to remain in a country." Danny O'Brien of the San Francisco-based Electronic Frontier Foundation said Yahoo's policies toward China are different from those toward other governments that censor the Web. "Generally speaking, Internet companies benefit from the fact that it really doesn't matter where you put servers," he said. "Normally if you face a difficult government in one country, you simply provide it from servers based in another country." O'Brien said search engines based overseas are regularly blocked by the governments of Singapore and Iran, for example, but "it's rare for companies to bend over backwards to ingratiate themselves to authoritarian regimes." O'Brien told OneWorld that Yahoo, Google, and Microsoft have each made different decisions on how to operate in China. He said that while all three allow censorship of their search engine, "Yahoo handed over private e-mail to the authorities, which lead to imprisonment of dissidents. Google decided not to introduce Google mail in China." O'Brien said the three companies have shown a different respect for their users' privacy here in the U.S. as well, noting that when the Department of Justice demanded details on who was using the Internet to look at pornography last year, Yahoo, Microsoft, and AOL complied, while Google resisted. The Justice Department initially requested a list of terms entered into the search engine during a single week (potentially tens of millions of queries) along with a million randomly selected Web addresses from various Google databases. After Google forced it to court, the federal government cut down the scope of its sweep to just 50,000 Web addresses and 5,000 search terms. ■

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL LAUNCHES MAJOR CAMPAIGN AGAINST INTERNET CENSORSHIP, FOCUSING ON MICROSOFT, GOOGLE AND YAHOO!

<http://www.business-humanrights.org/Links/Repository/389895>

Amnesty International, on Sunday, accused the world's Internet firms of colluding with repressive regimes to curtail online freedom. The human rights group launched a campaign against Internet censorship, singling out Yahoo, Microsoft and Google for complying with Internet censorship in China. "The Internet has become a new frontier in the struggle for human rights," said Kate Allen, director of Amnesty's British wing. "Its potential to empower and educate, to allow people to share and mobilize opinion, has led to government crackdowns," she said. Google has been criticized for cooperating with Chinese censors on its Chinese-language portal, Google.cn. Activists have criticized the company for blocking searches for material about Taiwan, Tibet, democracy and other sensitive topics. Google says it has to accept the restrictions in order to serve China, which has the world's second-largest population of Internet users after the United States. The company says it believes its presence ultimately will force Chinese authorities to be more open. Amnesty's online campaign, <http://www.irrepressible.info>, urges Internet users to sign a pledge for online freedom, and to include material which has been banned in countries such as China, Syria, Iran and Vietnam on their Web sites. The group plans to present the online pledges to a United Nations meeting on the future of the internet in November. ■

Nanotechnology: A small but important dimension to corporate responsibility

www.nanoethics.org

Nanotechnology - manufacturing on the scale of a millionth of a millimetre - is arriving on the global scene at a perilous time. Following major corporate disasters with high-profile names such as Firestone, Enron, Monsanto and others, ethics has never been tied so closely with companies' reputations or public relations. This is dangerous for the nanotechnology industry because it is fraught with an unusual number of potential ethical, and therefore PR, landmines. Nanotechnology is already gaining a reputation as possibly unsafe for consumers, workers, and the environment. It deals with manipulating materials at the scale of the nanometre, roughly the size of a simple molecule, and downstream manufacturing processes and product safety tests do not account for such small and reactive particles. Nanoparticles are so small that they pass through air and water filters, and may even slip undetected into our bodies and into our cells - with unknown effects. Even more worrisome, researchers from Zurich discovered that many Nanotechnology companies are simply not interested in safety testing in the first place. Of the companies surveyed in Europe, only 6 percent have studied the effects of nanoparticles on living organisms; only 20 percent investigated whether their nanotechnology products could be toxic; and 25 percent did not know if toxicity tests had been conducted. As the science is developed and more innovative products hit the market, we can expect other issues to come to the forefront. New surveillance and eavesdropping equipment will inescapably raise privacy questions, just as other new technologies have in the past. A question even arises whether the greater integration of technology in our lives (such as computers implanted in our clothing or bodies) makes us less human. Nanotechnology is predicted to give us greater military capabilities, such as energy weapons; shirts that can harden into protective armour; a bionic exoskeleton that gives the wearer super-human abilities; quantum computing for unbreakable codes; and much more. While money is being poured into military and consumer research, comparatively little is dedicated to humanitarian efforts, but it is in this area that nanotechnology perhaps can shine the most - helping to provide clean water, more food, affordable energy, new life-saving treatments, and more. ■

RUNNING A CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTER IN INDIA: AN INTERVIEW WITH THE HEAD OF OPERATIONS FOR DELL INDIA

http://www.mckinseyquarterly.com/ar_g.aspx?ar=1779&L2=1&L3=24

Dell Computer says that it is so encouraged by the talent it is finding in India that it plans to double its workforce there during the next four years. Romi Malhotra, the director of Dell's Indian operations, has led the development of three call centers in India over the past five years. In this interview, Malhotra talks about the lessons he learned in recruitment, retention, and career development-lessons that have made Dell an employer of choice in India's competitive labor market. If the first phase of off-shoring involved learning how to find and train the right people, the second phase has been about learning to unleash their energy and skills so that Dell's Indian call centers become global leaders. In the future Malhotra expects the impact of India's workforce to grow significantly-beyond support and toward innovation and leadership. ■

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT CONDEMNS ETHICAL BREACHES BY INTERNET SECTOR COMPANIES

<http://www.business-humanrights.org/Links/Repository/929033>

Reporters Without Borders hailed a resolution on online free expression that was passed today by the European Parliament and said it hoped the European Commission and EU member states would heed its recommendations. The resolution criticizes Internet sector companies that cooperate with repressive regimes and names several US companies (Yahoo!, Google, Microsoft and Cisco Systems) and European ones (Telecom Italia and France Telecom) that do so. It also welcomes a draft law designed to regulate the activities of Internet companies when operating in repressive countries - the Global Online Freedom Act (GOFA) - that has been introduced in the US congress. "This resolution shows that Europe is becoming aware of the extraordinary importance of online free expression and the need to regulate the activities of companies working in this area," Reporters Without Borders said, and added: "It is essential that Europe should move forward in this area at the same time as the United States to ensure that all companies respect the same ethical principles and that none of them can take advantage of more permissive legislation to increase their market share." The resolution calls on the European Commission to establish a "voluntary code of conduct" that places limits on the activities of companies in repressive countries and urges it to take account of the need for unhindered Internet access when considering its assistance programs to third countries. The resolution is not, however, binding on the commission, which has exclusive responsibility for implementing EU policy in this area. Yahoo!, Google and Microsoft are singled out for agreeing to censor themselves in China. Cisco Systems is accused of supplying Internet censorship technology. The European companies France Telecom and Telecom Italia are named because of their Internet area cooperation with Tunisia and Cuba. It mentions the list of 15 internet enemies compiled by Reporters Without Borders - China, Belarus, Burma, Cuba, Iran, Libya, Maldives, Nepal, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. ■

LABOR ABUSES CLAIM IN MEXICAN ELECTRONICS INDUSTRY

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/bcb43a7c-12d4-11db-aecf-0000779e2340.html>

Workers assembling electronic equipment in Mexico for Multinationals such as Dell, IBM, Hewlett-Packard and Sony are suffering discrimination and humiliating treatment despite a drive by these companies to stamp out labor abuses, according to a new study by Mexico's Center for Reflection and Action on Labor Rights (Cereal). Cereal is a partner of Cafod, the Catholic development agency whose exposé of labor abuses in the technology industry's supply chain resulted in the launch of the Electronic Industry Code of Conduct (EICC). Cases include workers being exposed to toxic materials; job applicants having to reveal their religious beliefs, sexual preferences and union affiliation, as well being forced to agree to submit to degrading tests; and temporary rolling contracts as short as 15 days that deny workers holidays and severance pay. According to the Cereal study, many of the problems lie with employment agencies that hire workers for contract manufacturers, which supply the multinationals. ■

UK's NATIONAL AWARDS TO IDENTIFY AND PROMOTE THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS OF ICT

<http://www.sustainit.org/publications/files/102-2005NationaleWell-BeingAwardssupplement.pdf>

SustainIT's eWell-Being Awards, now entering their fifth year, reward e-projects that are bringing tangible, practical benefits to the whole of society. Launched in 2002, the awards showcase best practice, stimulate the application of technology for social and environmental benefits, and raise awareness of the beneficial and inspirational uses of ICT, while raising the public profile of winners. Contenders compete in five categories: **Digital inclusion** is for voluntary sector projects that use ICT to enhance access to services and opportunities for individuals and groups. Examples may include projects that aim to reduce social exclusion, increase social interaction and improve access to jobs, education, entertainment, shopping, and cultural and leisure interests. **Age and disability**: seeks entries focusing on improving ICT access and services for elderly and disabled people. **Improving public services**: seeks entries that utilize ICT to deliver better customer services and public service delivery. **Better ways of working**: encourages more efficient and flexible ways of working. It covers mainstream business areas, which may not have been driven by environmental or social considerations, but nonetheless create them, such as teleworking schemes. **Climate change and environmental efficiency**: is for projects which make use of ICT to reduce energy, water and resource use. It is also open to projects which increase our understanding of the impacts or science of climate change. There were 135 entries this year ranging from a scheme to provide free computers and IT training for farmers and their families to an online transcription service with teleworkers all round the world. ■

VIEWPOINTS... WORKING WOMEN BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY LIFE IN THE ICT SECTOR

The Viewpoints section of the ICT newsletter aims to highlight a particular view of an emerging trend. As women are increasingly joining the IT workforce, this section presents viewpoints of four women working in the IT sector while balancing work and family life.

Working Women Balancing Work and Family Life in the ICT sector

Today, more and more women are joining the workforce in the booming IT sector. According to NASSCOM, the present ratio of men to women in the software industry is 76:24, and the estimate that this ratio is likely to change to 65:35 by 2007. As the field of technology is constantly evolving, the industry has much to offer employees who seek learning and growth opportunities. However, the high pressure of such demanding jobs calls for a greater responsibility on the part of workers who wish to maintain a healthy balance between work and family life. To illuminate the challenges faced by female workers managing both work and family lives, several case studies are presented in this issue of the CSR Bulletin.

Shruti, who is an analyst at an IT firm, was married approximately six months ago. She lives with her husband and has been working for more than a year. Shruti estimates that on a typical work day, she will spend only three waking hours at home, during which time, she reported, she will primarily cook and clean. Although her husband is very supportive and helps her to manage these chores, Shruti finds that she is unable to complete all of the household tasks and errands on a daily basis, and many projects are left for the weekends. Shruti reports that the need to complete tasks and errands on the weekends seriously cuts into her leisure time with her husband. Shruti stated that she is not considering children because she feels her job is too much of a responsibility. She noted that she sometimes works on holidays, and that the stress of her job has seriously affected her temperament.

For over three years, Payal has worked in the IT sector as a sales executive for a leading IT firm. Payal lives with her parents and reports that her family takes care of all the household chores, while she is sometimes responsible for shopping for household goods. Payal reports that her weekends include going out to meet friends and watching movies. Sometimes she must work on notified holidays, but she reported that her family is supportive when such circumstances arise. Payal reported that she is dissatisfied with the small amount of time she spends at home and wishes she could spend more time at home with her family.

Neetu is a software engineer who has spent the last seven years working for an IT company. She has been married for five years and has a two-year-old baby. She lives with her husband and in-laws, who take care of all the household chores. She has also hired a full-time nanny to take care of her baby, as she reports that she gets very little time at home. On weekends, Neetu stated that she tries to finish all pending jobs and errands, and she greatly enjoys spending time at home with her baby and the rest of her family members. She stated that she rarely gets time to go out with her family, and is very dissatisfied with the amount of time she spends at home. She reported that her job has affected her family planning decisions, as she wishes to build a strong foundation for her career before considering expanding her family. Since her office is located far away from home and commuting takes a considerable amount of time, Neetu voiced her desire for her company to provide free transportation services to its employees, as not having to negotiate transportation plans will save her time and reduce her stress level.

Jyoti also works in an IT firm as a project leader. She lives with her father and takes care of all the household chores, with the exception of shopping. Jyoti has worked in the IT sector for over three years and reported that she enjoys the challenges that her job has to offer. On a working day, she arrives home from work and does all the cooking and cleaning, and on weekends, she likes to go out and meet friends and relatives. She reported that the stresses involved in balancing her career and private life have not noticeably affected her temperament, but she admitted that the stresses have definitely affected her decision to stay single. ■

COMMUNITY INITIATIVE ... *BYRRAJU FOUNDATION*

BYRRAJU FOUNDATION PROMOTES ICT-BASED COMMUNITY GROWTH INITIATIVES

Many ICT companies feel a strong sense of social responsibility and have taken steps to invest their extensive resources in community work. This issue of the CSR Bulletin acknowledges ICT and its applications implemented by Byrraju Foundation in its initiatives. Byrraju Foundation attempts to build progressive and self-reliant rural communities via appropriate use of information technology.

Byrraju Foundation works in 154 of its adopted villages and is currently involved in 53 different delivery and support modules. These include various initiatives such as health, education, water, sanitation, environment, livelihoods, and virtual delivery of services. Guided by their belief that social justice is made possible only with the effective participation of village communities, donors, alliance partners, and other stakeholders, the Foundation has provided primary and secondary health care, improved literacy, established safe drinking water plants and constructed sanitary latrines, provided training for the unemployed, and facilitated virtual education centers. Please use the link below for more details on Byrraju Foundation:

<http://www.byrrajufoundation.org/>

SECTOR OVERVIEW

Focus on the Software Sector

In late 2005, ASK-Verité undertook a research study to increase understanding of existing and emerging social and environmental issues in the Indian IT sector and to identify practical solutions. The study focused on the IT software services sector, IT enabled services, IT hardware and computer electronics manufacturing, and e-waste.

The previous CSR Bulletin addressed the IT hardware/computer electronics manufacturing industry. This edition of the bulletin gives a brief overview of the Indian IT software services sector.

The Indian software industry is a leading provider of professional software services, with customized services being a primary function of the industry. India's competitive advantage in the software business has been its cost-effectiveness, world-class quality, high reliability, and rapid delivery. As a result, India accounts for almost 20 percent of the total software development activities that are subcontracted out.

This competitive advantage is leading many multinational IT companies like Texas Instruments to set up offshore software development centers and Research and Development laboratories. Over the last few years HP, IBM, Intel, Apple, SUN, Oracle, Microsoft and many other US companies have set up offshore software development centers where software teams in India and their US counterparts work in close conjunction on various aspects of software development.

The Indian IT services industry comprises a diverse group of companies – large near-billion dollar global companies, small start-ups, Indian companies, and multinationals.

This IT Software Sector is quite distinct from other traditional manufacturing sectors in existence and has been one of the high profile sectors in the country. Workers comprising the IT software sector have the prestigious title of “technology workers,” and even entry-level professionals in the sector begin with a white-collar job. Human Resource policies in this sector are also progressive and clearly defined. Companies are well known for making novel attempts to keep the lives of software employees as comfortable as possible. Extra perks provided for these workers include transportation, catering services, help desks, pleasant work ambience, gym facilities, and crèches (daycare).

The IT sector in India is growing at an enormous pace. The IT software and services market is expected to grow to US \$50 billion by 2009, recording a CAGR of 27 percent. With the increasing demand on the sector, a shortage of skilled manpower is emerging as one of the most critical issues challenging the industry. Copyright piracy is an increasing concern among IT firms. Piracy concerns remain at the forefront of the industry's concerns because there are few software laws protecting copyright issues, governmental efforts to curb software piracy are minimal and the high influx of PCs in the marketplace make it increasingly easy for the public to pirate software.

The study also revealed key employee health and safety concerns. Long hours of work and intense stress are closely associated with the IT/ITES sector. Stress due to deadlines keep workers under continual pressure, which is believed to result in physical ailments including muscular-skeletal disorders, deterioration of visual capacity, fatigue, and reproductive hazards.

To keep pace with the changing nature of the industry, employees must continually reconstitute their skills. They often need to change from work in one platform or language to another, in accordance with project requirements. Thus, keeping pace with rapid technological changes and the threat of jobs becoming obsolete are additional factors that add to stressful working conditions in this sector.

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Due to inter- and intra-firm mobility, employees often lack the time and opportunity needed for the development of long-term relationships and collective mobilization of any kind. Therefore, at present, there are no trade unions in the industry.

Gender inequity is also a challenge to the IT Software industry. There is a high concentration of male workers in export software firms, and fewer women are employed in these positions. Due to domestic responsibilities, some women report that they were unable to cope with both their home lives and the work intensity involved in high-end IT activities. However, the trend seems to be changing, as many women reported that they do not mind working beyond an eight-hour shift.

The growth of software technology is also giving rise to a phenomenon called “digital divide.” Most of the professionals populating the IT software sector come from urban backgrounds. Persons from rural backgrounds and lower caste groups have an immediate disadvantage in seeking IT software jobs as English-speaking skills are required and rural access to the English language is limited. Such disadvantages have contributed to the widening social and economic gaps between different social groups – especially among the younger generations. ■

GLOSSARY

BPO: Business Process Outsourcing
CDMA: Code Division Multiple Access
CSR: Corporate Social Responsibility
E Waste: Electronic waste
GeSCI: Global e Schools and Communities
HR: Human Resources
ICT: Information and Communication Technology
IT: Information Technology
ITES: Information Technology Enabled Services
KBI: Knowledge based industries
MAIT: Manufacturers Association of Information Technology
NGO: Non Governmental Organization
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WHO: World Health Organization
WEEE: Waste from electrical and electronic equipment