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Regional News

Economic Downturn Curbs Oil Demand, GHG Emissions
January 21, 1998 - Source: Kyodo News Service

The recent financial crisis in Asia has prompted a downward trend in global oil demand projections (with a commensurate fall in carbon dioxide emissions) for 1998, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). In 1998 projected demand for crude oil is expected to total 75.34 million barrels per day, down 280,000 barrels from its December estimate.

Nuclear Waste Shipment to Japan
January 13, 1998 - Source: Associated Press, NAPSNet Report

The Associated Press reported that the French government plans to ship 30 tons of highly radioactive nuclear waste through the Panama Canal early next month to Japan. It would mark the first time glass- encased waste from nuclear reprocessing in Europe would travel through the canal. Paul Leventhal, president of the anti-nuclear proliferation group Nuclear Control Institute, said that the US government has given no indication that it would oppose the planned shipment. He stated, "It looks like they're looking the other way and going along." Leventhal said that the waste contains four times the concentration of fission material than conventional used reactor fuel and should not be allowed through the Panama Canal. He cited a 1996 study by Sandia National Laboratories that argued that vitrified nuclear waste could be vulnerable to terrorist attack. Tom Clements of Greenpeace stated, "The shipment of these materials is dangerous any way you look at it." The planned shipment involves 60 containers of high-level nuclear waste left over from the reprocessing of spent fuel originally from Japanese reactors.

China

Environmental NGOs Utilizing TV
January 16, 1998 - Source: Yomiuri Daily

The Yomiuri Daily reported that Chinese non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are producing a series of television advertisements to alert Chinese citizens environmental concerns in China and around the globe. Yo Xiaoyi, the producer, director and narrator of the twenty minute programs, says, "In China today, we NGOs are happy to provide corporations with information. We will also work hand in hand with the administrative sectors in collecting garbage separated according to type." Government officials agreed to broadcast the programs on condition that the network never be required to pay production costs; these costs have been covered by the United Nations and other international organizations.

Wildlife Found at Lop Nur
January 14, 1998 - Source: Xinhua News Agency

Scientist searching for oil in Lop Nur (see Connectivity No. 13) have found wildlife in the remote region often referred to as the "Death Zone. According to the report, geese, wild camels, Tarim red deer, and Tarim rabbits were found at the former nuclear test site.

Grand Canal Shut-Down
January 13, 1998 - Source: BBC

The 400,000 residents of Xuzhou will be without water supplies for the next three weeks due to chemical spill in the Grand Canal. According to the report, the industrial waste was released by two paper mills earlier this month, polluting roughly forty kilometers of the world's longest man-made waterway.

CNPC Forecasts a Boom in Petroleum Production
January 12, 1998 - Source: China Daily

In an attempt to meet the country's growing energy needs, the China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) has tasked itself to develop 300 million tons of oil equivalent by 2010. According to the report, the CNPC increased its oil and gas production capacity an additional 15.92 million tons and 1.91 billion cubic meters respectively in 1997, the largest amount since 1990.

Wind Power Joint Venture Launched
January 6, 1998 - Source: China Daily

The China Daily reports that a national project to develop clean electricity generated by wind-driven turbine systems is set to begin operations this year. The project, Project Light, was announced at a singing ceremony for the Sino-US Xiangtan Bergey Windpower Co (XBWC), a first of its kind joint venture to design and manufacture wind energy units in China. The project will be capable of manufacturing 300 wind-driven generating units annually, each with a capacity of 10 kilowatts, according to the report. Xiangtan Electric Manufacturing Group Co, in Central China's Hunan Province, will provide the capital and US-based Bergey Windpower Co, will design and manufacturing the technology. According to the report, China has 72 million people living without electricity in 24,800 remote villages of 11 counties and 649 towns. Under Project Light, according to the report, an economically sound and safe power supply system will be provided to benefit remote areas' residents by making full use of their power resources, including wind, solar energy and hydropower.

Central Government's Launches Aforestation Project
January 3, 1998 - Source: China Daily

According to a China Daily report, the Chinese central government has launched a US$27.7 billion aforestation project in the 2.5 million square kilometer Northwest Loess Plateau, the primary watershed for the Yangtze and Yellow rivers. The project, to be implemented over 30 years, will span 26.6 percent of China's land mass, 410 counties, and 11 provinces. It is the central government's first attempt to fund a long-term, national project, according to the report. The project will focus on mediating soil erosion - which, according to the report, has already deteriorated by 40 percent - by focusing on aforestation projects in six key regions: the Three Gorges Dam and Jialing River valley areas, western Sichuan forestry region, Jinsha River valley in Yunnan Province, water and soil erosion area in the Yellow River's middle reaches, windy and desert areas in Loess Plateau, and the Yellow River source area in Qinghai Province. According to the report, twenty-six million hectares of forest will be planted in the

areas by 2030, bringing 60 per cent of the erosion-damaged areas under control. The project's short-term goal is to bring erosion and desertification under control by 2010. Roughly 60 percent of the project budget will be provided by the central government.

UNDP-PRC Knowledge Transfer Accord
December 31, 1997 - Source: China Daily

China and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) have signed a US$2.17 million accord to attract and fund qualified overseas scientists, technicians and managers to work in the PRC. According to the report, the initiative will focus on issues like poverty alleviation, environmental protection, economic reform and sustainable agriculture. The project, which will be launched this January and end in 2000, is officially called is Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals and Senior Technical Adviser Recruitment.

LPG Auto Development
December 25, 1998 - Source: China Daily

According to a China Daily report, the Beijing Liquefied Petroleum Gas Co (BLPGC) has developed a device which allows automobiles to burn LPG in place of gasoline. The US$1,220 device changes LPG from its liquid form to its gas form and burns it (Drivers switch from petrol to LPG or the other way round behind the wheel.) "The amount of carbon monoxide is reduced by 80 to 90 per cent when LPG is used," according to Ma Li of BLPGC.

In Shanghai, the first LPG-fueled taxi has taken to the road after the completion of the city's first LPG- filling station. Local officials have pledged to convert Shanghai's 40,000 taxis and public buses to LPG- fueled vehicles in five years. In Hong Kong, a fleet of 30 LPG-fueled taxis was recently introduced. The Ministry of Construction is preparing to draft related regulations and standards for LPG filling stations.

Indonesia

Indonesia to Phase Out Fuel Subsidies
January 15, 1998 - Source: Reuters

In a letter of intent to the IMF, Indonesia announced that it will begin phasing out subsidies on fuel and electricity. However, Reuters reports that prices for kerosene and diesel fuel, used mainly by Indonesia's poor, will not be affected immediately.

One Third of Indonesian Timber Companies Face Bankruptcy
January 14, 1998 - Source: Asia Pulse

Citing weak demand for plywood in Asia due to the financial crisis, roughly 30 percent of Indonesia's 111 timber companies are on the threshold of bankruptcy, according to an Asia Pulse report.

Indonesian Population Hits 202.5 million
January 2, 1998 - Source: Central News Agency (Taiwan)

Indonesia's national Family Planning Board announced earlier this month that the population has reached 202,535,000, an estimate far lower than the predicted 280 million citizens by the turn of the century. According to the report: the population growth rate has dropped below 1.6 percent in 1997; the average number of children in a family has dropped from six 30 years ago to 2.6 today; and concurrently, the infant mortality rate has dropped from 145 in every 1,000 births to between 50 and 55. Indonesia is the fourth most populous nation in the world.

Japan

Japan Scraps ROK Fisheries Accord
January 22, 1998 - Source: Yomiuri Daily

The Yomiuri Daily reports that Japan has unilaterally dropped its fisheries accord with Korea in the hope of re-negotiating the pact after Kim Dae Jung is inaugurated as the new ROK leader next month. The current agreement

will remain valid for a year after Seoul is notified of the decision, giving the two nations time to renegotiate a lasting agreement. According to the report, ongoing negotiations over the fisheries accord have been stalled over the disputed Takeshima/Tokdo group of islets. Both nations agree that the seas around the islands should be declared neutral, but they differ over the size of the neutral zone. If a new accord is not reached within the year's time, the U.N Convention on the Law of the Sea will enter into force.

On the same day, Australia banned Japanese boats from their waters after the Japanese failed to agree to lower catch quotas for dwindling stocks of southern bluefin tuna.

Japan-Russia Relations - GHG Negotiations
January 20, 1998 - Source: Korea Times, NAPSNet Report

The Japanese and Russian foreign ministers will meet in Moscow from February 21 for talks aimed at concluding a peace treaty, Japanese media reported on January 18. Japanese Foreign Minister Keizo Obuchi will head a delegation that will stay in Russia for three days for negotiations on the peace treaty, the Asahi Shimbun daily said. Meanwhile, the Sankei Shimbun reported on January 18 that the Japanese government had decided to negotiate with Russia on trading emission rights for "greenhouse" gases. Tokyo plans to sound out Moscow's intention to sell some of the rights to emit the gases at bilateral energy meetings set for late January, the daily said.

Japan, Canada Cooperate in New Energy Source
January 16, 1998 - Source: Kyodo News Service

Kyodo reports that Japan and Canada will cooperate to exploit methane hydrate, a 'next-generation energy resource' found under Canada's tundra. The joint project's first phase, the development of technologies to detect the distribution of methane hydrate underground, will be launched mid-year.

Japanese Nuclear Power Accident
January 16, 1998 - Source: BBC

A Japanese nuclear power reactor was shut down last week due to a rise in radioactivity in one of its reactors. The plant, operated by the Tokyo Electric Power Company, said it would investigate any possible leak of nuclear fuel at the Kashiwazaki Kariba plant on the Sea of Japan coast. The report said that there is no indication of radiation leak outside of the facility.

Japan-Russia Fisheries Agreement
January 13, 1998 - Source: Segodnya, NAPSNet

Segodnya's Andrey Ilyashenko reported that on December 30, after more than two years of talks, an intergovernmental arrangement was agreed upon by the RF and Japan concerning Japanese fishing in the area of the Southern Kurils, and an agreement on related issues is to be signed soon. According to the agreement, Japanese authorities, not RF ones, shall investigate and punish Japanese vessels caught poaching there. However, the poachers shall remain "the objects" for the RF Border Guards and the RF Fishing Inspectorate. Japan is to get 2.2 thousand tons quota to catch octopi and other sea products, but will pay the RF 20 million yen in compensation and supply some 15 million yen worth of fishing equipment. Segodnya's author said the compromise creates "very important prerequisites, including psychological ones, for talks on a peace treaty between Russia and Japan.

Malaysia

Some Components of Bakun Project to Continue
January 22, 1998 - Source: The Star

According to a Star report, the Malaysian government will continue work on some components of the controversial Bakun hydroelectric dam project, including a river diversion tunnel and relocation of villagers, despite the fact that the project has been deferred. The government, who scrapped plans due to financial and feasibility constraints late last year, did not give any further information to the extent and timing of the project.

North Korea (DPRK)

DPRK Power Shortage

December 31, 1997 - Source: Korea Herald, NAPSNet Report

An ROK government official said on December 30 that the DPRK turned off its propaganda speakers early this month, as it apparently faces an electricity shortage. "The North has, since December 1, completely stopped blasting the South over its speakers (near the Demilitarized Zone)," said the official. The official attributed the halt to the DPRK's failure to generate enough electric power. "The North has dilapidated machinery for power generation, and its coal stocks have almost run out," he said.

Papua New Guinea

PNG Famine
January 7, 1997 - Source: South China Morning Post

According to the Australian Agency for International Development, over one quarter of Papua New Guinea's population is facing starvation as a result of the ongoing drought. "The worst is about to happen," according to Mike Bourke of Australian National University. Mr. Bourke confirmed reports that most of the starvation was due to poor governance, as much of the food bought by the government for drought relief had been kept in provincial capitals and away from the worst affected areas. Furthermore, while the Government budgeted money to buy the food, Mr Bourke says, but had not allocated money to transport it to areas in need.

Russia

Nuclear Subs in Need of Assistance in Russian Far East
January 22, 1998 - Source: Reuters, ENN

According to a senior Russian Atomic Ministry official, international assistance is urgently needed to clean up nuclear waste from over 100 nuclear submarines - with unremoved nuclear reactors - wasting away in Russian Far East ports. "The government is well aware of this problem but the lack of finances is complicating the task of liquidating nuclear weapons and fulfilling international disarmament treaties," said Vladislav Petrov, the ministry's specialist on the issue. In 1995, according to the report, the Russian government adopted a program to clean up its nuclear waste problems, however, due to its poor financial situation and costly implementation the program has been virtually scraped.

Russia-PRC Nuclear Cooperation
December 29, 1997 - Source: Associated Press, NAPSNet Report

The Associated Press and the Los Angeles Times reported that Russia signed a deal Monday to build a nuclear power plant in the PRC. Russia said the deal was worth US$3 billion, while the PRC gave a figure of US$2 billion for equipment plus unspecified construction costs. The PRC's official Xinhua news agency reported that two 1,000-megawatt generating units of the Russian-built plant in Lianyungang, a coastal city northwest of Shanghai, are to begin operating in 2004 and 2005. Russian officials said the reactors will be "light water" units considered much safer than Chernobyl-style graphite units. The contract is the product of a 1992 nuclear-cooperation agreement signed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin during a visit to the PRC.

Taiwan

Taiwanese Environmental Delegation in Australia
January 14, 1998 - Source: Central News Agency

In an effort to improve ROC environmental protection efforts, a 37 member delegation of environmentalists and media representatives from the Republic of China arrived in Australia last week to meet local environmental officials for a series of briefings on Australia conservation efforts. ROC Environmental Protection Administration (EPA) Deputy Administrator Wu Yi-hsiung, stated that the ROC government is raising its environmental efforts as the island is small, yet has a population of more than 21 million people.

Taiwan Seeking to Corner Electric Bike Industry by 2010
January 6, 1998 - Source Central News Agency

Taiwan's Premier, Vincent Siew, announced plans to launch six new industries, including an electric motorbike manufacturing sector, as part of the country's quest to become a fully technologically advanced nation by 2010. The Premier disclosed that the ROC government has recently contracted Delco Electronics Inc. of the United States for joint development of battery exchange systems for electric motorbikes. According to the report, it is estimated that approximately US$1 billion will be needed to replace all 1.4 million motorcycles estimated to be on the streets in the four major cities of Taipei, Hsinchu, Taichung and Kaohsiung. To help foster demand, the ROC has begun to develop its own battery manufacturing industry, as well as a system of battery charge stations, according to the report.

Thailand

Officials Pressing for Environmental Amendments
January 14, 1998 - Source: Bangkok Post

The Bangkok Post reports that Thai officials are busy drafting amendments to the Environment Act to give it the necessary teeth to deal with polluters who fail to act on mitigation plans specified in their environmental impact assessments (EIA). "Articles related to EIAs are our focus because they lack enforcement power to force project owners to implement the mitigation plans," said Chartree Chueyprasit, deputy secretary-general of the Office of Environmental Policy and Planning. The 1992 Environment Act requires operators of large projects such as commercial ports, power plants, and large hotels to conduct an EIA prior to applying for operating licenses.

United States

US to Import Taiwan Nuclear Waste
January 18, 1998 - Source: Korea Times, NAPSNet Report

The Herald-Journal of Spartanburg, South Carolina reported that a US hazardous waste disposal company, Chem-Nuclear Systems, intends to bring radioactive metals from Taiwan into South Carolina. If approved by federal regulators, it would mark the first US commercial imports of such waste from Taiwan, a US Nuclear Regulatory Commission official said. Chem-Nuclear Systems is seeking a special license to import about 1.3 million pounds (590,000 kilos) of contaminated tubes and tube plates from Taiwan Power Company's Chinshan Nuclear Power Station.

USTR Praises WTO Ruling
January 15, 1998 - Source: USIA

US Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky praised a World Trade Organization (WTO) appellate body decision which affirmed an earlier ruling against the European Union's ban on hormone-treated beef. In a prepared statement, Barshefsky claimed the ruling reflects the US and WTO view that WTO members do have the right to establish product health and safety standards higher than the internationally accepted standards but only when based on good science, not protectionism. In the same statement, Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman said, "We hope and expect that the EU will now take the necessary steps to bring its policies into compliance with WTO obligations by moving to lift the ban on beef from the United States and other affected countries."

US Government to Cut Government Energy Bill by US$1.5 billion
January 14, 1998 - Source: M2 Presswire

Earlier this week, US Secretary of Energy Federico Pena announced the Department of Energy's Financing Renewable Energy and Efficiency (FREE) Savings program. According to the report, FREE seeks to retrofit government facilities with energy efficient technologies at 'no cost to taxpayers'. Six energy service companies have won contracts for the work, whereby they would pay all costs to upgrade or retrofit energy equipment in the

buildings, and then be reimbursed up to $750 million from the energy cost savings.

"The FREE Savings Program is the largest set of energy efficiency contracts that have ever been awarded," said Secretary Pena. "The federal government is the largest consumer of energy, and we are determined to become the most efficient user of energy."

The energy bill for the United State's 500,000 federal buildings is roughly $4 billion a year. Over its lifetime, FREE Savings program is expected to award more than $5 billion in private sector contracts to install energy efficient and renewable energy technologies. Which are expected to cut federal government energy costs by $10 billion over the life of the equipment.

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