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### Regional News

#### **Haze Spurs Ministerial Gathering**

February 24, 1998 - Sources: BBC, The Straits Times

Environment Ministers from the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) met earlier this week to address the Indonesian forest fires, which are once again threatening the region's transport, tourism, and public health. The ministers reviewed the progress of ASEAN's "Regional Haze Action Plan," and reaffirmed commitments for Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia to spearhead strengthening their preventive measures, building fire fighting capacity, and monitoring.

#### **Nuclear Power to Grow in Asia Despite Crisis**

February 17, 1998 - Source: Reuters

The recent financial collapse in Asia will likely promote greater use of nuclear power, according to Kun Mo Chung of the Energy Systems Research Center at Ajou University, Korea. Chung cites the region's dependence on imported energy (80% in Japan and 90% in Korea) and worsening terms of foreign exchange, weak social opposition to nuclear power, and the fact that Asian countries are expected to expand electricity generation by more than five percent a year during the next 20 years (as compared with one per year in most OECD countries), as drivers of growth in the industry. According to the report, nuclear power already has a firm foothold in the region: providing Japan with 33 percent of its electricity, South Korea with 35 percent and Taiwan with 30 percent.

#### **APEC Senior Officials Meeting**

February 16, 1998 - Source: Reuters

Reuters reports that APEC senior officials agreed last week to press forward with commitments made last year to remove barriers to trade, despite the current economic crisis. "No one is using the crisis to backtrack," a senior diplomat said, "that's not to say there is not some grumbling. But no one is blocking the process."

At the November 1997 annual summit, APEC members agreed to accelerate liberalization in nine sectors (environmental goods and services, fish and fish products, forest products, medical equipment and instruments, telecommunications mutual recognition agreement, energy, toys, gems and jewelry, and chemicals) by 1999, and to begin work on five other sectors (oilseeds and oilseed products, food, natural and synthetic rubber, fertilizers, automotive goods and civil aircraft).

According to another source, although the member states agreed to move forward on the liberalization process, there is concern over Japan's lack of leadership in this process. "People believe it is important for Japan to show strong leadership in the area of liberalization," one diplomat said, adding that Tokyo has been particularly reluctant to open its markets for fish and forest products.

The other major outcome of the first SOM of 1998, was Malaysia's gaining support for its campaign to streamline APEC into a leaner organization. A task force chaired by Malaysia, New Zealand, and Brunei will begin working on this effort later this year.

### **Region's Jobless Threaten Regional Security**

February 13, 1998 - Source: Sydney Morning Herald

The collapse of the Asian "miracle" and the dismantling of communism in China is threatening regional security as millions are left jobless, according to a Sydney Morning Herald report. According to the report, formerly authoritarian regimes are now facing a dangerous backlash as millions are thrown-out of work without a comprehensive social safety net. The report cites Indonesia's estimated 8 million unemployed (40 million "underemployed"), China's 20% unemployment rate, and the repatriation of tens of thousands of Southeast Asian workers, as indicators that social dislocation may lead to unrest in the mid- to near-term.

### **Australia**

### **NSW Environmental Law**

February 11, 1998 - Source: Sydney Morning Post

The Sydney Morning Post reports that New South Wales authorities are now employing satellites and aircraft photography to prosecute polluters and farmers clearing land illegally in a new push to better enforce its environmental laws. According to the report, the Land and Environment Court, an arm of the Supreme Court of New South Wales, has also enlisted a number of high profile barristers to shepherd a new wave of increasingly high-profile environmental crime cases - resulting in huge fines and even a jailing. In the last financial year, NSW courts imposed a record of nearly A\$700,000 in fines for environmental offences, compared with A\$323,500 in 1995-96. This financial year the tally has hit nearly A\$500,000 in the first six months, although this includes a record single fine of A\$250,000.

### **China**

### **Beijing Begins Fight Against Sulfur Dioxide**

February 20, 1998 - Source: China Daily

A recent report from the Beijing Municipal Environmental Protection Bureau outlined how local governments need to be responsible for the reduction of sulfur dioxide, a major contributor to acid rain. According to the report, following Beijing's lead, municipalities will be required to carry out comprehensive assessments and monitoring of sulfur dioxide, boilers must obtain air discharge certificates before starting operations, promote energy conservation techniques, and encourage the use of natural gas over coal. The report was presented to the National Conference on Comprehensive Prevention and Control of Sulfur Dioxide and Acid Rain Pollution.

### **Labor Unrest in China**

January 28, 1998 - Source: The Straits Times

The Straits Times reports that a veteran Shanghai activist has called on union action against the government in response to massive layoffs. Yang Qinheng was quoted as saying, "The reform of state-owned enterprises has caused the layoff of many diligent workers and the trade unions only stand by while the laid off workers just sit at home and

wait." According to the report, Beijing is well aware of the threat organized labor is becoming - the report likens them to the political force of Poland's Solidarity movement - and is taking steps to limit their activities. The layoffs, which will eliminate 11 million jobs, are part of a major government effort to overhaul its highly inefficient state enterprises.

## **Japan**

### **Japan to Halt Loans for Chinese Coastal Infrastructure**

February 11, 1998 - Source: Kyodo

The Japanese government announced that it will discontinue loans for road and other infrastructure development projects in China's coastal region from fiscal 1998 to shift assistance to other areas, according to the Kyodo news service. The Japanese government reports that loans will be directed to less developed inland provinces as well as projects for environmental conservation, particularly to address air pollution and the curbing of emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

### **Japan-ROK Fisheries Dispute**

January 23, 1998 - Source: AP, NAPSNet report

The Associated Press reported that Japan scrapped the 1965 fishing accord with the ROK on Friday after talks to renew it deadlocked. However, Japanese Foreign Minister Keizo Obuchi said that Japan will continue "to work earnestly on the negotiations." ROK Foreign Ministry spokesman Lee Kyu-hyong responded, "It's a very unfriendly act that Japan, as a neighboring country, has unilaterally abolished the accord because its excessive demand was not accepted." He added that the ROK would allow its boats to fish freely in Japan's coastal waters. The ROK National Assembly also passed a bill demanding that the ROK ambassador to Japan be recalled. ROK fishermen and activists said they planned an anti-Japanese rally in Seoul on Saturday. Foreign Minister Yoo Chong-ha said that "a cooling-off" period would be necessary before any talks can be resumed, but added that the government has no plan to recall its ambassador to Japan. Chung Dong-young, a spokesman for President-elect Kim Dae-jung, stated, "The Japanese action is not desirable for the future of both countries. We believe that the fisheries accord is an issue that should be resolved through dialogue and negotiations, not an issue that can be resolved through forceful measures."

## **Russia**

### **Russian Far East and APEC**

February 16, 1998 - Source: Reuters

The Russian far east is set to reap the benefits of its anticipated APEC membership, according to the head of the Russian delegation to the recent APEC Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) in Malaysia. "While membership is of vital importance for the whole of Russia, the first row of gainers must be the regions of the far east and Siberia," Mr. Denisov told Reuters. According to Denisov, APEC would provide Russia with broader access to the world marketplace, while Russia would bring APEC natural resources, advanced industry, and skilled and well educated labor. Late last year, APEC member economies agreed to admit Peru, Russia and Vietnam as members-designate. They are expected to gain full admission in November when APEC holds its annual summit in Kuala Lumpur.

## **Taiwan (ROC)**

### **Clash over Incinerator**

February 22, 1998 - Source: Central News Agency (Taiwan)

The Central News Agency reports that about 20 policemen and 6 residents were injured in clashes over the proposed incinerator in central Changhua. The conflict began when the estimated 200 protestors staging a sit-in protest outside the construction site, began to attack the roughly 2,000 policemen by throwing rocks, excrement, bricks and poles after police began forcibly removing protestors from the site. The incinerator project has been stalled for the

past three years due to local resident's opposition.

## **Thailand**

### **UNDP Shifts to Grassroots in Thailand**

February 5, 1998 - Source: Bangkok Post

In the wake of the financial crisis, the United Nations Development Programme will shift its national focus to addressing social impacts at the grassroots level in Thailand, according to a Bangkok Post report. "We are discussing programs not just to help the jobless people going back to the rural areas cope with the situation, but also to develop new skills for them," Michael Heyn, UNDP chief in Thailand, said. According to the report, the Thai government has made a special request that the UNDP to pay special attention to the four Muslim-dominated southernmost provinces, where Thai workers have been repatriated from Malaysia.

## **United States**

### **Climate Treaty and US Nuclear Weapons/Trade Policy**

January 23, 1998 - Source: Washington Post, Reuters, NAPSNet

Reuters reported that US Senator Jesse Helms, R-NC, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said Thursday that he would stall action on a nuclear weapons test ban treaty until the Clinton administration submits the Kyoto global warming treaty and amendments to the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty to the Senate. Helms said that, because of "growing danger posed by rogue states possessing weapons of mass destruction, it is vital that the Senate conduct a thorough review of the ABM Treaty this year." The administration has said it will delay submitting the global warming treaty to the Senate until developing countries have agreed to join.

A week later Republican leaders warned President Clinton that the Kyoto agreement could jeopardize Republican support for "fast track" trade negotiating authority. "We fear that your support for the Kyoto treaty will erode the atmosphere of cooperation and trust undertaken in support of fast-track legislation, making it extremely difficult for us to maintain the level of support necessary to pass this (fast-track) bill," Rep. Tom DeLay, of Texas, said in a letter to Clinton. "Your willingness to put the United States at a comparative disadvantage to the rest of the world economies has called into doubt your ability to hold the line under similar circumstances on future trade negotiations," DeLay said.

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