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Regional News

Green Trade Needs Special Study, Envoy

April 18, 1997 - Source: Bangkok Post

Thai Ambassador to the WTO, Krirk-krai Jirapaet, stressed today that attempts to link trade and environmental protection must be studied very carefully before moving ahead in the WTO's Committee on Trade and Environment. The Ambassador noted that "green" regulations are still perceived by fellow developing countries as a ploy to restrict their goods from Western markets. Stressing that developing countries with limited resources are being given only a few years to improve their environmental standards, while developed countries with far more funds took decades. Ambassador Krirk-krai said the Thai private sector had begun to study the issue and to improve manufacturing processes in line with environmental conservation.

Mekong Ministers Push For Greater Cooperation

April 18, 1997 - Source: Bangkok Post

At a Mekong subregion ministerial conference in Manila last week, Ministers of the Mekong River

basin (Burma, Cambodia, China, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam) agreed to mobilize resources to further regional economic cooperation. The first step, ministers agreed, is the development of physical links through road, rail, telecommunications and electricity networks. ADB vice president Lee Bong-Suh said about $9 billion would be needed in the next 10 years for transport and telecommunications projects, while power projects would require from $4 billion to $5 billion every year until 2000. The ministers also agreed that "private financing will become, in the long run, the key source" of financing for sub-regional projects. Rapid growth in the region is expected to continue at 7-10% annually, with per capita incomes expected to more than doubling in the next decade. Rapid population growth is also expected, leading to a 50 percent increase by 2020

APEC Looks to Private Investment for Infrastructure

April 6, 1997 - Source: Associated Press

APEC Finance Ministers agreed this week to improve investor protection, open domestic monopolies and launch a variety of other measures to attract private investment to foot the bill for the region's infrastructure. According to a World Bank report to the Ministers, rapid economic growth, swelling populations, and poor government infrastructure investment will force the region to spend at least $1.5 trillion in infrastructure projects over the next 10 years, or threaten sustained rapid development. While previous APEC meetings were often criticized for a lack of specifics, participants praised the progress achieved in Cebu. ``We've finally come out with some specifics,'' said U.S. Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin. ``I really think this session validated the utility of the APEC process.''

ADB Forecasts Stable Asian Growth

April 17, 1997 - Source: Dow Jones Business News

Despite the recent economic slowdown, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) predicted stable growth to continue in Asia. The ADB noted that Asia continued to be the fastest-growing region in the world, despite the slow down in growth from 8.2% in 1995 to 7.4% in 1996. The Manila based bank expects growth rates to stabilize at this level in 1997 and 1998. The slack in growth, according to the report, is attributed to sharp drops in exports (catalyzed in the electronics sector), tighter monetary policy, conservative fiscal policies, and the sharp rise in the U.S. dollar against the yen.

In an assessment of the effects of new World Trade Organization rules on Asian Developing Countries (ADCs), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) concluded that new WTO rules for global trade present opportunities and challenges for Asian developing countries, particularly in textiles, intellectual property and agricultural sectors (**ADB Says Asia Will Benefit from New WTO Ruling** April 17, 1997 - Source: ADB Press Release). The ADB reports that the WTO's liberalization of merchandise trade could raise global income by $94 billion annually -- or over $200 billion if such gains lead to higher levels of investment, half of which going to developing countries.

Trade Loss from Environmental Measures Exaggerated

April 14, 1997 - Source: Environmental News Network

A study by the Global Environment & Trade Study at Yale University, concludes that trade loss from environmental measures are exaggerated. Studying nine recent international disputes involving

trade bans for environmental reasons, the report finds economic losses were temporary and trade tended to return to prior levels following a brief period of adjustment. The study, titled "Trade-Related Environmental Impacts: Sizing and Comparing Impacts," calculated the direct and indirect economic impact of environmental trade bans in each of the nine cases, and weighed economic losses against environmental benefits. The study, written by Professor James Lee of the School of International Service at American University, finds that environmental measures that impeded or stopped trade did not mean the trade was lost, but more likely diverted elsewhere. For more information, contact James Lee, The American University, (202)885-1691, email: JLee@American.edu

Shrimp Producers to Form Alliance to Fend Off Green groups' Attacks

April 5, 1997 - Source: Bangkok Post

Shrimp producers led by Thailand will set up the Global Aqua Allies, an organization to promote intensive shrimp farming and fend off attacks by environmental groups, the Fisheries Department revealed yesterday. The group was initiated by Thailand during an international meeting on aquaculture - World Aqua '97 - in Seattle, last February. "The organization will declare its philosophy to develop an environment-friendly shrimp farming system to produce large quantities of shrimp to serve the world food security." Its goal is to make shrimp a popular source of protein accessible to consumers of all income groups, said an industry spokesperson. The group claims it will "green" shrimp production through the development of a closed farming system in which effluents and contaminants are treated and reused.

The organization will certify shrimp raised in accordance with these standards as being environment-friendly products. But a Thai environmentalist who participated in the World Aqua '97 remains unconvinced. Pisit Chansnoh, president of Trang-based Yadfon Association, argued that shrimp farming was destructive in nature and environmental impact was inevitable. The closed farming system may seem a good idea because by-products will not be discharged, he claims. However, salt water and chemicals concentrated in the farms will eventually leak out, and moreover, the equipment promoted is far too expensive for local fisherfolk to afford. Mr Pisit advocates conserving coastal resources to maintain breeding grounds to enable poor villagers who were undernourished to have access to fishery products.

Australia

Australian Toxic Waste Trade

April 19, 1997 - Source: Sydney Morning Herald

A coalition of international environmental groups claim Australia, and other industrialized countries, are continuing shipments of toxic wastes to India despite bans. In a demonstration in New Delhi on Thursday, a coalition of local and international groups against the dumping of toxic industrial by-products in Asia, cited Australia's transport of 16 shipments of lead waste scrap and two zinc ash shipments to Bombay in January and February. Australian law requires exporters to obtain permits before sending waste overseas. "India is aware of the problem," an Indian official said. "We have accepted the Basel Convention, we will not accept hazardous waste from industrial countries." The environmental group, Greenpeace, claims Asia is targeted as a dumping ground because more than 100 non-Asian countries have banned toxic waste imports, with India as the leading importer of waste followed by Indonesia, the Philippines and China.

Australian Coal Exports to Asia on the Rise

April 8, 1997 - Source: Central News Agency (Taiwan)

Australia's coal industry is preparing for a boom to meet Asia's growing demand for coal, according to the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resources Economics (ABARE). ABARE expects that 1997 coal exports will rise to 145 million tons, up from 140.5 million tons in 1996 and 136.7 million in 1995. Australia is expected to meet the rising export demand, by investing some A$5.5 billion to raise production capacity. Australia is the region's largest coal exporter.

Similarly the Australian uranium mining industry is reportedly set to open ten new mines, despite uncertain demand (**Australia Environmentalists Fear Uranium Mining Growth** April 9, 1997 - Source: AP-Dow Jones News Service). 'It's a sheer impossibility that Australia can open 10 new mines and still find the markets. Once a handful have been developed, the market will be close to saturation,' according to Michael Krockenberger of the Australian Conservation Foundation. Australia provides 11% of the world's uranium.

Burma

Workshop on ASEAN's Structure Commences for Prospective Members

April 10, 1997 - Source: New Light of Myanmar

A workshop on ASEAN's Structure and Mechanism: Planning Issues for Myanmar's Membership, jointly sponsored by the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS) and the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF), Singapore, commenced in Yangoon today. The workshop included several briefing sessions by officials from the four bureaus of the ASEAN Secretariat and a panel discussion on the AFTA process. This workshop is the second in a series of workshops that will be organized in cooperation with the HSF in preparation for Myanmar's entry into the ASEAN. It is being attended by the ambassadors of the Seven ASEAN countries, and ambassadors from the Lao People's Republic, Cambodia, and Myanmar.

Burmese Energy Delegation Returns from ROK

April 7, 1997 - Source: New Light of Myanmar

A six-member Myanmar energy delegation led by the Minister for Energy, U Khin Maung Thein, returned today from a trip studying the Republic of Korea's energy sector. The trip was made at the invitation of ROK Minister of Trade, Industry and Energy Mr Chang Yuel Lim. During their stay in Korea, the two ministers discussed investment and cooperation in oil, natural gas, electricity and industry. The delegation also discussed investment and cooperation in energy and construction between the two countries with a group led by S Y Park, Chairman of Hyundai Corporation.

China (PRC)

Wide Scale Shutdown of Polluters

April 16, 1997 - Source: China Daily

A nationwide inspection of the 70,000 small and medium sized enterprises ordered to shut down for seriously polluting the environment, will begin April 17. The inspection, to be conducted by the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) and the Ministry of Supervision, will certify that local municipality , provincial, and autonomous regions have enforced the shutdowns. The inspection intends to spur local governments' effort to enforce environmental protection, said Xie Zhenhua, director of NEPA. NEPA reports, that mass media will be mobilized during the inspection to disclose to the public the results and serious violations.

US Environment - Technology Trade Mission

April 7, 1997 - Source: China Daily

A three-day US environmental trade mission, led by the US Department of Commerce, ended today. The mission concluded the first concrete bilateral environmental cooperation activity after the China-US Forum on Environment and Development co-chaired by Premier Li Peng and visiting US Vice President Al Gore on March 25 in Beijing. Although no agreements were signed the US companies left hopeful that they could play an important role in helping China handle its serious problems with air and water pollution and waste management.

China generates an estimated 1 billion tons of industrial solid waste, 95 million tons of hazardous waste and 155 million tons of urban refuse annually. The country is looking for foreign technology and expertise to deal with the problem, however capital investment has been slow. China spent 6.7 billion yuan ($808 million) into environmental cleanup in 1996 - this represents 1 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP). The PRC Government is determined to spend 1.5 per cent of its GDP, or about 16 billion yuan ($1.9 billion) to handle the problem by 2000. The 11 companies on the delegation specialize in solid and hazardous waste management, and resource recovery technologies and services.

Chinese Criminal Law Takes Pollution Seriously

April 11, 1997 - Source: China Daily

The newly amended Chinese Criminal Law will hold environmental polluters and those who damage natural resources responsible for their actions. The law, to take effect October 1, will be the first time in the PRC's 48 year old history that environmental degradation will be a crime. The new Criminal Law, which was amended and passed by the session of the National People's Congress last month, includes provisions on punishing -- with imprisonment and fines -- those who import, discharge, dump and dispose of harmful wastes that result in serious damage to public and private property or human health. To curb lax enforcement, the law also stipulates that personnel in environmental protection departments who, through dereliction of duty, allow serious pollution discharges or accidents to occur, are to be sentenced to imprisonment.

Alleviating Poverty Should Not Threaten Environment, Minister April 5, 1997 - Source: Xinhua News Service/China Daily

Thursday, at the closing session of a three-day national conference on aiding the poor through science and technology, Chinese State Councilor Song Jian, warned that alleviating poverty should not come at the expense of the nation's natural resources or by causing environmental pollution. Song, also minister in charge of the State Science and Technology Commission (SSTC), said development of the poverty-stricken areas should focus on the rational and permanent use of

resources and protection of the environment according to law.

Fees Imposed to Curb Pollution

March 25, 1997 - Source: China Daily

Fujian Province's success in collecting fees for environmental damage has prompted nearly 20 cities and prefectures throughout China to join the practice. The fees target industry engaged in mining or other industries exploiting natural resources and causing damage to the environment, which in turn, provide funds for restoring environmental problems in mining areas. Zhuang Guotai, an official with the National Environmental Protection Agency (Nepa), said that the experimental collection of fees for damage to the environment has created a basis for a transition to levying environmental taxes in the future

Japan

Japan Pushes G-7 to Utilize the Internet to Publicize Green Efforts

April 14, 1996 - Source: Japan Times

Japan has tabled a proposal to utilize the Internet in an appeal for the preservation of the environment at the June G-7 summit in Denver, according to Japanese government sources. The environment is expected to be high on the agenda at the summit. The sources said Japan is proposing that environmental education be the main theme of the leaders' Internet efforts, with children, parents and corporate executives being the primary targets. "The Internet projects by the G-7 and Russian leaders, if actually initiated at Denver, will not be restricted to a call for more environmental education," one source said. "They will probably touch on a wide range of topics." The United States is expected to push children's health issues, with Germany calling for an early conclusion to an international forest-protection treaty. The summit will be immediately followed by the United Nation's special session in New York to review the progress of sustainable development efforts over the past five years since the Earth Summit in 1992.

Japanese ISO 14,000 Certification on the Rise

April 7, 1997 - Source: ISO Integrated Solutions

Asia is quickly becoming a "hot bed" of ISO 14001 environmental management system implementation and registration activity, according to a recent report from the standards body. Japanese companies are leading the way with an estimated 700 to 800 companies to be registered to ISO 14001 by the end of 1997. Toyota, Sony, Canon and Panasonic are among Japanese companies that have publicly announced plans to have all manufacturing facilities worldwide registered to ISO 14001.

Japanese Loans Surge as ODA Falls

Japanese Loans, a major part of Japanese official development assistance (ODA), surged 17 percent from the previous year to a record 1,299.3 billion yen (10.3 billion dollars), the Foreign Ministry said Thursday. Ministry officials said the sharp gain was due to growth in loans for infrastructure improvement projects in fields such as environmental protection, education and medical and health

care. However, in dollar terms, the value of Japanese loans is shrinking as the yen continues its plunge against the dollar.

In a related statement the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reports a fall in Japanese overseas aid by 35% in 1996 to $9.58 billion, marking the first decline in dollar terms in seven years (**ODA DROPS** April 7, 1997 Source: Yomiuri Shinbun). The Ministry attributes the plunge to the yen's depreciation against the dollar and tight fiscal policy.

Japan to Phase out Economic Aid to Taiwan

April 6, 1997 - Source: Central News Agency (Taiwan)

Japan has notified Taiwan its intention to phase out its economic aid program to the island, worth NT$70 million (US$2.55 million) annually, by the year 2000. Japan is weaning Taiwan from its aid list in light of the island's rapid economic growth, according to officials. Japanese economic aid to Taiwan began in 1960 under the "Taiwan-Japan technological cooperation program". After the two countries severed diplomatic relations in 1972, the program was carried out by Japan's unofficial Interchange Association and Taiwan's Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Japan. The program has sent 5,226 Taiwanese to Japan for training, and brought some 2,038 Japanese technological experts to Taiwan, and transferred US$15.29 million of equipment from Japan to Taiwan.

Malyasia

Malaysia Urges Courts to Jail Polluters

April 9, 1997 - Source: Agence France Presse

The Malaysian Government is to press its judiciary to impose mandatory jail sentences on chief executive officers of companies convicted of seriously damaging the environment. "The cabinet has directed the ministry to go for mandatory jail sentences apart from fines because it feels that fines alone are not enough as the polluters can afford to pay," said Law Hieng Ding, Minister of Science, Technology and Environment. Malaysia's Environmental Quality Act calls for fines of up to 100,000 ringgit (40,000 dollars) and five years in jail for serious polluters.

Taiwan (ROC)

Taiwan EPA Scolds Public

April 17, 1997 - Source: Central News Agency (Taiwan)

According the Taiwan Environmental Protection Administration (EPA), the public's poor habits are partially to blame for Taiwan's worsening environment. EPA officials made the remarks after a private environmental organization published a survey showing Taiwan's "misery index" has risen in the past year. The index has a scale of 20 to 100, with 100 being the most negative rating of environmental pollution. In 1995, the first year the survey was taken, the index measured 75.39. It dropped to 74.74 in 1996 before climbing to 76.84 this year. The EPA urged the public to improve its performance in curbing motor bike emissions, stray dogs, spitting of betel nut juice, and illegal garbage dumping.

Thailand

Thailand Threatened by Climate Change

April 11, 1997 - Source: Bangkok Post

A recent report by the Thailand Environment Institute (TEI), concludes global climate change will force drastic crop and cultivation changes, transform rainforests into deciduous forests, more intense heat waves, drought, and other drastic ecological changes to Thailand "We can't deny that global warming has something to do with us. The change will soon affect marine life and sea levels," said TEI president Dhira Phantumvanit. The TEI report further argues that Thailand's air pollution and hot summers will increase as temperature rises and as deforestation limits the forest's ability to absorb carbon dioxide (a greenhouse gas used in photosynthesis). The report encourages the government to press on with its 50-million-rai reforestation project and take action against illegal logging, reduce fertilizer use, grow varieties of rice that emit less methane, and impose a carbon tax on high-carbon content goods. The report concludes that greenhouse gas emissions could be reduced by 30% in Thailand if all of the proposed actions are taken.

United States

US Turtle-Shrimp Stance Hypocritical?

April 17, 1997 - Source: Environmental News Network

The Humane Society alleges that 41% of Texas shrimpers it surveyed had violated US regulations to protect sea turtles. Human Society undercover investigators said 13 of the 32 vessels they boarded had disabled their turtle excluder devices, the very mechanism the US mandates other countries use if they want to export shrimp to US markets. The Texas Shrimp Association called the report "a hoax", noting that US Coast Guard investigators reported 96.9% compliance with the law. The Humane Society says it does not dispute the Coast Guard figures, however, they point out that shrimpers know when Coast Guard inspectors are coming.

Clinton Announces Agreement to End Apparel Sweatshops

April 14, 1997 - Source: USIS

On April 14th, President Clinton announced an agreement with labor, human rights and industry leaders, to improve the working conditions in US industry owned garment and footwear companies and their foreign contractors. Clinton said this agreement, "will improve the lives of millions of garment workers around the world." "Human rights and labor rights must be part of the basic framework under which all businesses compete," he said. The cornerstone of the agreement is a voluntary workplace code of conduct that companies will adopt in an effort to improve the conditions under which their goods are made. The code includes, a 12 hours of overtime cap, a minimum or prevailing wage clause, and prohibit the employment of workers under the age of 15.

US Eyes Indonesia for New Sanctions

April 8, 1997 - Source: Agence France Presse

Despite protests from Europe and Japan, a US state that slapped stiff sanctions last year on companies operating in military-ruled Burma may expand the law to cover Indonesia as well. The sanctions bill, under consideration by a Massachusetts legislative panel, targets Indonesia's treatment of East Timor, the former Portuguese colony it seized in 1975. Japan and the European Union (EU), are formally protesting the Burma sanctions as a violation of World Trade Organization rules and oppose the Indonesia bill on the same grounds. The EU is less concerned about the Massachusetts law and legislation per se, according to an EU spokesperson, than the possibility that it could inspire other states to do the same, possibly targeting countries like China. If passed, the law would be the first law anywhere outside of Portugal to restrict trade with Indonesia because of East Timor.

No US Sanctions for Burma

April 5, 1997 - Source: Washington Times

President Clinton has decided not to impose economic sanctions on Burma's military regime for now, despite Rangoon's worsening human rights record, a U.S. official said earlier this month. Instead, President Clinton is embracing a "middle-of-the-road" policy that would combine new steps against the regime, with a deadline for changing its behavior or face U.S. sanctions, the officials said. "A continuation of the upward slope of pressure against the Burmese regime is what he's called for," the official noted. "The president has given them a two-minute warning." The administration stresses that the decision is not final, but is expected to be made official in a few weeks.

Legislation to Weaken Tuna-Dolphin Ruling Advances

April 16, 1997 - Source: Associated Press

Legislation that would weaken the current US "dolphin-safe" label on tuna products was endorsed today by a House committee, and could be considered by the full House of Representatives within a few weeks. The bill, which ends the import ban on tuna caught with nets, would provide tuna products the "dolphin-free" label as long as it is certified that no dolphins actually were found dead in the nets. Many environmentalists have criticized the use of nets because fishermen often deliberately catch dolphins along with the tuna. Other groups, including the Greenpeace, the Center for Marine Conservation, the World Wildlife Fund and the Environmental Defense Fund, support the new legislation claiming that protection of dolphins should be pursued internationally with a regional agreement that would afford greater protection to all marine life. A similar bill was approved by the House last year, 316-118, but died in the Senate, where opposition still is strong.

Clinton Begins Fast Track Campaign

April 11, 1997 - Source: Associated Press

US President Clinton gave his first personal pitch in the administration's campaign to win congressional approval for fast track authority (see Connectivity No.1). The President argued that he deserves the authority to negotiate trade agreements - fast track requires Congress to accept or reject them without amendments - as every president since 1974 has received. Clinton made the comments at luncheon of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Negotiations to win "fast track" authority, which expired in 1993, have been at an impasse with congress over the President's insistence that he be allowed to include labor and environment as part of any new trade agreement negotiations. Republicans are hesitant to give him this broad negotiating mandate. Faced with heavy

opposition from fellow Democrats, the President is courting the Republicans as they control both houses of Congress.

In a letter to Clinton, House Speaker Newt Gingrich said he was ``deeply concerned'' that the president had yet to submit a request for negotiating authority to Congress because of the debate over the labor and environmental questions. ``While I know you share my deep commitment to promoting environmental protection, sustainable development and improving labor conditions, you cannot allow those who insist on incorporating those issues into trade authority to halt our progress toward reaching good trade agreements,'' Gingrich told Clinton in his letter. The House has 227 Republicans, 205 Democrats, one independent and two vacancies. One source, said administration vote counters were looking to obtain only about 45 Democratic votes in support of fast-track authority, enough to make up for an expected loss of 50 Republican votes.

Connectivity is a bi-monthly information service reporting on trade, environment and development issues in the Asia-Pacific. The *Monitor* is emailed to members of the ***Asia Pacific Regional Environment Network*** (APRENet). To register for this free service please fill out the on-line registration form at or send email to nautilus@nautilus.org

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Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development
2342 Shattuck Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94704USA
http://www.nautilus.org
nautilus@nautilus.org

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Nautilus Institute
608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email: nautilus@nautilus.org