Connectivity 5.8.97

Recommended Citation

"Connectivity 5.8.97", Aprenet, May 08, 1997, https://nautilus.org/aprenet/connectivity-5-8-97/

Connectivity
Asia-Pacific Trade, Environment and Development Monitor

APRENet Home Nautilus Home

May 8th, Vol.1 No.3

Regional News

ASEAN Against Labor Standards

April 24, 1997 - Source: Singapore Press Holdings

ASEAN labor ministers reaffirmed their position against international labor standards. "There should not be any ... link between labour standards and economic and trade issues, and we reached a consensus on that," said Vietnamese Labour Minister Tran Dinh Hoan after the meeting of ASEAN labour ministers. ASEAN claims that the US and its Western backers have adopted a pro-labor standards position in response to fears of losing market shares to cheap labor.

WTO Panel to Hear Shrimp-ban Complaint

April 21, 1997 - Source: Bangkok Post

Thailand and the United States have agreed on the members of a panel that will study the US ban on shrimp imports. The panel was appointed under the dispute settlement provisions of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on April 10. Michael Cartland of Britain will chair the group, with Kihan Delbruck of Germany and Carlos Cozendey of Brazil. Krirk-krai Jirapaet, Thailand's Ambassador to the WTO, said all three members have expertise in trade regulations and environmental issues.

Developing Country Growth to Continue

April 23, 1997 Source: AP-Dow Jones News Service

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported in its semi-annual 'World Economic Outlook,' that economic growth for developing countries is expected to reach 6.6% in 1997, a 0.1% growth from 1996. This achievement is the fifth year in a row for 6% growth. With the continuation of growth, average developing inflation is expected to fall to 9.7% from last year's 13.1%. Asian growth, however, is expected to reach 8.3% this year, a 0.1% jump. The report cites Asian domestic controls on demand and support for export oriented policies contributing to the process of trade liberalization, especially in China.

Australia

Australia Searches for Allies Against Greenhouse Gas Reduction April 29, 1997 - Source: Environmental News Network

In light of the strategy sought by the OECD for mandatory greenhouse reductions, Prime Minister Howard has cautioned Japanese Prime Minister, Ryutaro Hashimoto, that compliance with the greenhouse reduction targets would seriously damage the two countries economically. Citing a Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE) study, Mr. Howard said a 10% cut in emissions would cost each Australian $9,000. The report claims that the 2020 emission reduction target would result in the cutting of coal, iron and steel production and the higher electricity charges for consumers. Mr. Howard has asked Japan to consider Australia's special circumstances in it's decision to adopt the standards.

ABC Cuts

April 23, 1997- Source: Agence France Presse (AFP)

After cuts to its 1997-98 funding by the Liberal government, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation has decided to cut its international radio and television networks in order to concentrate on its domestic services. Its international broadcaster, Radio Australia, has provided the main source of news and information for the East Asian region since 1939. Its closure has resulted in appeals from many countries' political leaders to maintain the service and criticisms from the Labour opposition that the conservative government has failed in its commitment to broaden engagement with Asia. The service, providing news to 20 million people in 9 languages, will be reduced to only providing service in pidgin to Papua New Guinea and other South Pacific nations.

Burma

Burma Defies US Sanctions

April 23, 1997 - Source: AFP

Despite U.S. sanctions against Burma, analysts report the sanctions will have very little effect on their economy considering Burma's weak economic ties with the west and its strong dependence on

its Asian trading partners. In addition, according to the report, the sanctions will not cover existing investments. Meanwhile, ASEAN is ignoring US pressures to isolate Burma, and has continued plans for its inception into ASEAN later this year.

China Attacks US Sanctions

April 23, 1997 Source: AFP

China criticized the U.S. for interference into Burma's affairs via the sanctions it has imposed on the country due to the anti-democratic regime's repressive tactics. China, a major foreign investor in Burma, said that imposing sanctions on Burma can only heighten tensions and conflict.

Peoples' Republic of China

New Automobile Standards

May 2, 1997 - Source: China Daily

At the China International Vehicle Emission Control Exhibition and Symposium in Beijing, the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) announced that it would adopt legislative and administrative means to improve cleaner production techniques, to reduce waste resulting from auto manufacturing and adopt stricter emission standards for new cars (17 new standards in total). In addition, leaded gas is to be phased out by the year 2000. The State Science and Technology Commission (SSTC) has also incorporated into the Ninth Five-Year Plan an environmentally conscious auto industry as part of the plan. The SSTC is also planning to work with auto makers around the world to manufacture electric cars, to be developed by 2000. Finally, the symposium discussed the alarming increase in air pollution as a result of the discharge of more than 10 million tons of carbon monoxide every year.

China Seeks Energy Investment

April 24, 1997 - Source: The China Daily

At the two-day World Energy Council Asia-Pacific Regional Forum, vice-minister of State Planning Commission Ye Qing announced China's quest for international cooperation in developing its energy sector. Due to the low level of funds and technology, however, China's use of coal, oil and natural gas remains very low. In order to develop their energy sector, China will set up a number of energy projects that will be supported by the State via bank loans and the encouragement of international direct investments, joint investments, or the transfer of advanced technology and equipment. In addition, China will promote international cooperation in gas and oil resource exploration and investment via the adjustment of its gas and oil prices with international standards. China also plans international cooperation in the exploration of coalbed methane, the power industry and in the construction of new hydropower and thermal plants.

China Bans Imports

April 22, 1997 - Source: The Bangkok Post

New consumer goods regulations are to go into effect as of October 1 on 20 different types of

imports. Thai exporters are worried as safety certificates would be required for those imports. China has invited Thailand's commercial consul to discuss any leniency and for the possibility for Thailand to establish its own inspection mechanism.

Corruption, Infrastructure Threaten China's Economy

April 21, 1997 - Source: AFP

A report released by the Australian foreign affairs and trade department said that China's potential economic boom will be hampered by corruption, weak infrastructure, public sector inefficiency and a lack of skilled labor unless it solves its problems immediately. The report follows Prime Minister John Howard's visit to China to establish a regular dialogue on human rights. Australia recently showed its commitment to China by refusing to co-sponsor the United Nations condemnation of China's human rights record. The report predicted that if China improves its deficiencies, then it would become Australia's third leading trading partner by 2000 and its productive output would surpass the US's by 2020. One of the main problems impeding China's growth, according to the report, is the weak performance of state owned enterprises due to excessive wage and subsidy packages among others and to infrastructure weaknesses such as in rail and road transport.

Greening Shanghai

May 2, 1997 - Source: China Daily

Shanghai will spend $1 billion annually, or 3% of its GDP, on "greening measures" in its quest to become "one of the world's top environmentally sound cities by 2010". The top three projects in its plan are cleaning up the Suzhou River, the development of a greenbelt around the city between the urban and rural areas, and the relocation of many factories and people from the city center in order to develop "green space."

China and the WTO

April 24, 1997 Source: AP-Dow Jones News Service

Reaching the critical stage of negotiations, China and the World Trade Organization's Director-General Renato Ruggiero are working on the final balance of interests that must be met between the two sides before China joins the WTO. A point of contention is that China wants to protect its banks and weak state-owned companies. The U.S., Japan and European members, however, want China to open up its markets. This has left many wondering if China's entry into the WTO is going to take much longer than expected. China has said that it is willing to be flexible in its stance on membership, but it won't bend too far. Having to already wait 11 years in order to enter the WTO, China has said that it would be willing to wait even longer to get the right condition in order to join.

Ruggiero Gives China Demands

April 24, 1997--The Asia Times

Concluding a four-day visit to China, WTO Director-General Renato Ruggiero stressed that in order for it to be accepted into the WTO, China must make an "ambitious offer" to open its markets to foreign trade, a key barrier to China's entry into the organization. Ruggiero hinted that China should make such an offer at the next round of negotiations in Geneva in May. China has said that its accession into the WTO should not be politicized and that conforming to the rules of world trade is unfair and influenced by power politics. However, diplomats have said that the Chinese team of negotiators in Geneva in the past few months has been more professional and it has shed some of its

prejudices against the West.

Japan

Grants to China Resume

April, 1997 - Source: Asia Environment Review

Japan will release ¥1.7 bn in grant aid to China, suspended since 1995 due to Japan's objection to China's nuclear testing. Up to one third of the aid is likely to be targeted at environmental projects.

Hitachi to Focus on Environment

April, 1997 - Source: Asia Environment Review

Amid sluggish growth in Japan's electrical machinery markets, Hitachi, the country's largest electrical/electronics company has decided to focus its activities for heavy machinery on environmental protection.

Philippines

WTO Commitments Approved by Supreme Court

May 2, 1997 Source: AFP

Rebuking complaints raised by President Fidel Ramos' government opposition, the Philippine Supreme Court ruled that the country's import tariff reduction commitments under the World Trade Organization's treaty that was signed by the Senate in 1995 was legal and falling within constitutional boundaries. The Court ruled that the Senate exercised its legitimate authority and that it did not make its decision based any malicious intent.

Republic of Korea

ROC/DPRK Waste Shipment

April 25, 1997 Source: The Korea Herald

Taiwan should not dump its nuclear waste in North Korea as a permanent dumping site. That was the message environmental organizations gave to Taiwan at the International Seminar for Preventing Transboundary Movement of Nuclear Waste in Northeast Asia. Renata Hsu of the Taiwan Environmental Protection Union expressed his regret that Taiwan has to ship its waste to North Korea. The reason North Korea has been chosen, according to Hsu, is due to the economic hardships in the country. However, a major threat to such a move is the potential health hazards that exposure will cause to not only North Koreans, but also to South Koreans. The seminar is expected to discuss the possibility of proposing laws banning inter-state shipments of nuclear wastes.

ROK Presses for Technology Transfers

April 16, 1997 Source: Earth Times News Service

South Korea's Environmental Minister, Hyon Wook Kang, stressed the importance of the transfer of technology from developed countries to developing countries in order to maintain sustainable development. According to Kang, considering the concern that developed countries express for such environmental hazards stemming from developing countries as pollution and the destruction of forests in their zeal for economic growth, the developed countries should provide the technology in order to make sure that the growth is also environmentally sustainable. The developing countries do not have the means to finance such technology and, moreover, the developed countries have the expertise and the means to provide the necessary assistance. South Korea has already started to implement a "Green Vision 21" and is planning to invest $90 million for environmental protection.

Consumption Organization Launched

April 30, 1997- Source: The Korea Herald

"The Society for Life Reform" has been launched with the goal of promoting thrift and environmental protection via reforms in culture and family life. One of its current goals is simplifying weddings and funerals as they tend to be extravagant in Korea. The excesses spent on such occasions, according to the organization, lead to environmental destruction, traffic congestion, and eventually an economic slowdown as people give unreasonably large amounts of money gifts and spend too much on grave decorations.

US Raises ROK Consumption Reduction Efforts to WTO

April 26, 1997 Source: The Korea Herald

Not convinced that South Korea is not involved in any way with the frugality campaign going on against imports, the U.S. and the EU have met with Renato Rugierro, Director- General of the World Trade Organization to persuade South Korea to clearly state its opposition to the frugality campaign. Both the U.S. and the EU have expressed suspicions about South Korea's claim that it has nothing to do with the anti-import campaign being waged in its country. South Korea, however, maintains that it has nothing to do with the movement against imports, but is a private social/environmental movement.

ROK to Raise Energy Prices

April 30, 1997 Source: The Korea Herald

The South Korean government plans to gradually raise energy prices by the year 2000 as part of a plan to improve economic efficiency and save energy and to readjust energy prices to the average standard for non-oil producing OECD members. The extra tax revenues will be used to give incentives to investors of energy-preserving facilities. In addition, regulations calling for the efficient use of energy will be enforced and strengthened.

Thailand

Race to Meet ISO 14,000

April 25, 1997 Source: The Bangkok Post

Upon eventual pressures from the EU, Japan and the U.S., Thailand is racing to meet the ISO 14000 standard unless it wants to have its exports rejected by the aforementioned trading partners. ISO 14000 or the Environmental Management System, emphasizes safety and environmental regulations. The Thai government is also planning to set up The National Institute of Safety and Health, which would be responsible for checking the standards and auditing safety and environmental standards at factories. Although ISO 14000 is currently voluntary, there is a good indication that the trading partners will make it mandatory on Thailand if it wants to continue exporting its products with them as ISO 9000 showed a few years ago. The price to pay for adopting such measures is a hike in implementation costs for companies.

Income Disparity Threatens Prosperity

April 25, 1997 - Source: The Bangkok Post

During a seminar held by the Finance Ministry yesterday, Excise Department director general Dr. Somchai Richuphan said that income distribution and social inequality must be remedied in order for Thailand's economy to grow and stabilize further. The conference recommended shifting industry to the provinces where land and labor costs are lower, and to empower local authorities to collect and handle tax revenues themselves. Thailand has one of the highest income gaps in the world

Thailand to Phase Out CFCS

April 24, 1997 Source: The Earth Times

Thailand has joined the ranks of developed nations as the first developing nation to ban the production and import of CFC (chlorofluorocarbons) produced refrigerators. The Thai government, with the cooperation of refrigerator manufacturers, began its phase out of ozone-depleting substances in 1992 according to the United Nations Environment Programme.

United States

US To Require Energy Efficient Refrigerators

May 2, 1997 - Source: Environment News Network

The US is to require 30 percent more energy savings from refrigerators by 2001, according to Energy Secretary Federico Pena today. The new refrigerators will conserve about 25 billion kilowatt hours of electricity annually by 2020. Consumers could end up paying $160 more for refrigerators if manufacturers pass on the higher costs of making the new models, but appliance makers said the price might not climb much above today's average of $600.

US Imposes Shrimp Ban on Ecuador and Columbia

May 1, 1997 - Source: USIA

The State Department has dropped Colombia and Ecuador from the list of countries eligible to export wild-harvested shrimp to the United States. In its May 1 annual determination, the

department listed 40 countries as meeting U.S. turtle protection requirements that serve as a condition for exporting shrimp to the U.S. market. A State Department official said that Colombia and Ecuador were certified in previous years for having adopted programs requiring their shrimp boats to use turtle-excluder devices TEDs), but were decertified now after U.S. officials observed they were not enforcing those programs.

Among the countries certified are those that require their shrimpers to use TEDs; those where shrimpers use only manual rather than mechanical means to harvest shrimp (a situation considered not harmful to turtles); and those where shrimpers harvest only in cold waters where no turtles are at risk.

The countries currently certified are Argentina, the Bahamas, Belgium, Belize, Brazil, Brunei, Canada, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Finland (just added), Germany, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Jamaica, Mexico, the Netherlands, Nigeria, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Oman, Panama, Peru, Russia, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Kingdom, Uruguay and Venezuela.

EPA Fines Hasbro for False Labeling

April 19, 1997 Source: The Wall Street Journal

Hasbro, the U.S.-based toy company, has been fined by the EPA $120,000 and ordered to change its claim that its new line of toys will protect users from germs. The antibacterial claim stems from a agent called Microban, which is applied to the toys and they supposedly protect children from mold, mildew, fungi and bacteria. However, the agent has not been approved by the EPA for the claims that Hasbro has already made. Hasbro has been ordered to relabel their products within 90 days and to change all packaging in the future from the claim that Microban has health benefits.

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