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Regional News

Japan - ROK EEZ Dispute
July 15, 1997 - Source: Chosun Ilbo, Korea Herald

(NAPSNet)

About one thousand ROK fishermen rallied in downtown Seoul yesterday to protest Japan's recent seizure of four ROK fishing boats in its unilaterally expanded territorial waters. The disputed area, located near Japan's western shores, has been shared by both nations since the 1965 ROK-Japan fisheries accord. Japan now claims the waters should be under its own sovereignty and would like the 1965 agreement to be amended to conform to that claim. The ROK's National Federation of Fisheries Cooperatives (NFFC), the rally organizer, said that Japan's expansionism violated the 32-year-old accord. A federation of sailors' trade unions, under the ROK's Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU) also held a separate protest rally in central Seoul, near Chonggak. The FKTU issued a statement, representing 70,000 union members, arguing that the Japanese government's seizure of ROK fishing boats is illegal. The statement was also sent to the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, denouncing the alleged physical assaults against the ROK sailors detained in Japan. (Korea Herald, "JAPAN DENOUNCED OVER FISHING DISPUTE," 07/15/97)

ROK Foreign Minister Yoo Jong-ha said at a Monday press conference that the ROK will not accept Japan's unilateral imposition of its maritime economic exclusion zone (EEZ), and also will not resume fishing negotiations until Japanese authorities revoke their earlier decision. Yoo stated that according to UN conventions regarding the sea, negotiations regarding EEZs and fishing rights should be conducted simultaneously. Japan is calling for the temporary recognition of its declared EEZ while fishing discussions are underway, and also wants access to Tokto Island for its trawling

fleets until the question of sovereignty of the island is finally decided. The ROK's position is to reject any claims on Tokto Island and the proposed temporary EEZ until the maritime matters are finalized in bi-lateral talks. Yoo concluded by saying that because the ROK government does not recognize Japan's EEZ, it cannot order ROK fishermen not to enter Japan's claimed territorial waters. (Chosun Ilbo, "MINISTER YOO REJECTS JAPAN'S DEMANDS ON EEZ," 07/15/97)

Greenpeace Expands into Southeast Asia
July 7, 1997 - Source: Reuters

Greenpeace announced plans earlier this month to expand its efforts into Southeast Asia with campaigns on climate change, oil exploration, and forest destruction. Greenpeace opened its first office in the region last year in Hong Kong and is expected to base its Southeast Asia campaign in either India or Thailand, according to the report. Although the environmental organization is not expected to drop its hard-edge tactics, Greenpeace representatives acknowledge that "confrontational tactics used in the West might not be suited to South East Asia and China."**DPRK-Taiwan Nuclear Waste Deal**
July 13, 1997 - Source: AP AP-Dow Jones News Service (NAPSNet)

The AP-Dow Jones News Service reported that Taiwan's United Daily News newspaper reported Sunday that Taiwan's Atomic Energy Council (AEC) has initially approved shipments of radioactive waste to the DPRK that could begin in September. The nuclear authority reportedly gave high marks to the DPRK's design and environmental impact study for twin storage sites now under construction and will give final approval after further "substantive" checks and formal issuance of permits for the sites, the newspaper said. AEC officials are expected to visit the sites themselves, and Taipower can begin shipping the waste in September if plans proceed on schedule. The ROK strongly opposes the plan to ship up to 200,000 drums of radioactive waste to the DPRK, saying it can't be trusted to follow international safety standards. The international environmental group Greenpeace also denounced the shipments, claiming the waste contains highly radioactive materials produced in the nuclear power generating process. Taipower says the barrels contain mostly clothing and other materials exposed to radiation at the island's three nuclear power stations. The company is expected to pay at least US$227 million for storing the waste in abandoned mine shafts near Pyongsan, about 90 kilometers north of Seoul.

ASEAN Delays Admitting Cambodia
July 10, 1997 - Source: Associated Press

The Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) Ministers agreed this week to indefinitely postpone the entry of Cambodia into the organization. The decision came in response to the country's recent political turmoil. Burma and Laos are expected to enter the organization later this month as planned.

Greater Mekong Subregion Agrees to Reduce Trade Barriers
July 8, 1997 - Source: Bangkok Post

Ministers of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) have agreed to reduce their trade and investment barriers, according to the Bangkok Post. The GMS, launched three years ago, is comprised of Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Southern China, Thailand and Vietnam. Pornchai Rujirapa, a representative from the Thai National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), concluded the deal reflects sweeping changes in the region's ideological makeup. "Just three years ago, these countries would normally have moved backward when trade and investment issues were raised," he said. The process of opening markets is set to begin with a study by GMS members on how to best improve trade and investment development in the subregion. GMS delegates are scheduled to meet again in

October in the Philippines to talk about cooperation in seven key sectors: transportation; telecommunications; energy; trade and investment; human resource development; tourism; and environmental management.

Canada-Chile Free Trade Agreement
July 4, 1997 - Source: United Press International

The Chilean Senate passed legislation this month which effectively struck-into-force the Canada-Chile Free Trade Agreement. The trade accord was approved with "agreements ensuring respect for environment and labor laws," according to the report. Canadian Environment Minister Christine Stewart claimed the agreement would "encourage environmentally responsible trade through enhanced cooperation between our two countries and with the Canadian environmental community, and the effective enforcement of environmental laws." The trade accord, which provides immediate duty-free access of 75 percent of Canadian exports and the elimination of Chile's 11 percent import duty on most industrial and resource-based goods over the next five years, was formally signed in Chile on December 5, and given royal assent from Canada April 25.**Australia**

Japan Avoids Confrontation With Australia on Climate
July 15, 1997 - Source: Sydney Morning Herald

In a meeting commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Australia-Japan Commerce agreement, Japan's Minister for International Trade and Industry Shinji Sato denied reports that he criticized Australia's position on greenhouse gas emissions. After the meeting, Sato met with reporters and said, "Whether we support (the Australian position) or not is not the point in question at this moment." Sato cited the fact that Australia and Japan have been able to "keep our steps together so far" and added that the two countries were able to reach consensus on the the 'Denver Communique,' which calls for greenhouse emission targets should be "meaningful, realistic and equitable." Sato's comments contradict remarks made earlier this week in which the Sydney Morning Herald quoted Sato as saying Australia's proposal of differentiated targets was "not enough."

Howard 'Victorious' on Climate in NYC
July 6, 1997 - Source: Dow Jones Newswires

Australian Prime Minister John Howard claimed victory "beyond our wildest expectations" in preventing consensus on binding targets to curb climate change at the ninth United Nation's General Assembly Special Session to review implementation of Agenda 21 (UNGASS). "That deal did not eventuate...that was my real fear. I frankly didn't expect to do as well on that score," he said upon his return to Australia. According to the report, Howard's bi-lateral talks with President Clinton were instrumental in gaining assurances from the US that it would not endorse the 'discriminatory European approach' to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Australia, is against specific limits on greenhouse gas emissions supported by the European Union.

Australia Remains Firm on Climate
July 8, 1997 - Source: Reuters

This week, Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer reaffirmed Canberra's strident opposition to compulsory targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. "The reality is because we are a relatively small and highly specialized economy we cannot afford the cost involved in taking a disproportionately high share of the global greenhouse abatement effort." Australia, according to Downer, supports the process of "differentiation," goals tailored to individual country needs, in combating global warming. According to a recent Australian Bureau of Agricultural Economics

(ABARE) report, if proposed European limits on greenhouse gas emissions are carried out, Australia, a major coal exporter, is expected to face an estimated cumulative loss of A$150 billion (US$112.5 billion) by the year 2020.

China

China to Attempt EMS Accreditation

July 10, 1997 - Source: Globe Net

After approval by the Chinese State Council in late May, the China Advisory Committee for Environmental Management System (EMS) Accreditation was established. China, following steps already taken by the US, the Netherlands and Japan, hopes to gain accreditation status as a part of the International Standardization Organization's 14001 series. Due to the curious dual accreditation bodies for China's ISO 9000 standards, mutual recognition of EMS accreditation system will come only after close inspection.

China Begins Afforestation to Create Firewood

July 8, 1997 - Source: Agence France-Presse

The Chinese government recently launched a large scale afforestation campaign while banning tree cutting in the province of Xinjiang. Ministry of Forestry representative, Guo Huaiang, reported that this attempt to create three million hectares of trees for firewood comes in response to a 90 million ton annual firewood shortage. The plan, which will target deforestation of primary woodlands, will receive a 150 yuan subsidy per hectare of forest.

Waste Dump Sparks Rare Chinese Protest

July 9, 1997 - Source: Reuters

In a rare sign of public protest, over 50 residents of the Beijing suburb Shangzhuang staged a protest at a nearby garbage dump this week. The residents began their direct-action campaign after their calls for the government to close down the dump, which according to the residents is polluting their air and groundwater and making local people sick, went unanswered. During the week-long protest, residents blocked the road to the dump, waved banners, and forced several garbage trucks to turn back, according to the Reuters report. "As people, we have basic human rights," one man said. "I am outraged at this." Local police have threatened to break up the protest, but to date have not carried out their threat.**Japan**

Japan Plans UN Cuts

July 11, 1997 - Source: Daily Yomiuri

In an attempt to cut official development assistance budgets, Japan will cut voluntary contributions to selected United Nations organizations by 20-50 percent, according to government sources. Most effected by the cuts will be the UNDP, UNHCR, and UNEP, whose Japanese contributions will be slashed by 50 percent. This will bring Japan's contributions to the agencies to 7 billion, 5 billion, and 2.5 billion yenrespectively. The projected cuts come in response to last week's call by Prime Minister Hashimoto to reduce the nation's ODA budget by 10 percent in fiscal 1998. In addition, the government has decided to halt funding worth a total of 1 billion yen to 20 international organizations, according to a high-ranking government official.

Japan Expected to Join EU in Action Against Massachusetts Law

July 4, 1997 - Source: Japan Times

Japan is expected to file a complaint with the World Trade Organization over the Massachusetts law

that denies state contracts to companies doing business in Burma. The European Union recently filed a similar complaint and is now in the first stages of the WTO's dispute-settlement procedures. Japan and the EU argue that the law violates the WTO agreement on government procurement practices.

Japan Pushes for Liberalization of Environmental Goods in APEC
July 2, 1997 - Source: Japan Times, Bangkok Post

According to Japanese government officials, Japan plans to propose talks on liberalizing trade in environment-related equipment and services within upcoming APEC negotiations. The proposal will be submitted to New Zealand, chair of the trade and investment committee, by the July 15 deadline for member economies to submit proposals for market-liberalization talks in specific industrial sectors. Canada is also expected to propose liberalization of goods and services which fall under the, yet to be defined, "environmental category."Other APEC member liberalization proposals of note include: Hong Kong is expected to propose the Toy Market; Australia the energy sector, and, according to a Bangkok Post report, Thailand has offered its medical equipment, energy, rice, canned seafood, canned fruits and vegetables, natural rubber and frozen fish sectors for liberalization.**Japan Urged by WTO and EU to Change Fish Quotas**
July 9, 1997 - Source: Central News Agency (Taiwan)

After complaints by the European Union (EU) over Japan's non-tariff barrier import quotas for mackerel, Japan has agreed to alter the basis of their quota system by March 1998, a WTO report said July 9. Instead of being based on import prices, the quota will be determined according to weight, the report said. In late July, South Korea will abolish its fish quotas leaving Japan as the only industrialized nation to maintain the import quota practice.

Toyota Plans to Become Environmentally Responsible
July 9, 1997 - Source: Reuters

Toyota recently announced plans to produce more fuel efficient automobiles starting this year, according to a recent Reuters report. Toyota's new environmental initiative includes plans to market an electric vehicle, a hybrid car powered on batteries and gasoline and a more efficient diesel engine.

Tokyo Bay Oil Spills
July 2-7, 1997 - Source: Wall Street Journal, Japan Times, Daily Yomiuri

Japanese work crews finished their clean-up of what was originally estimated to be Japan's worst oil spill. The spill, totaling roughly 400,000 gallons, was about one tenth of that originally estimated. Officials claim that the actual amount of leaked fuel was far below their original predictions as most of the oil did not escape but instead filled the tanker's internal ballast tanks. However, the 6.4 kilometers by 1.6 kilometers wide spill has still threatened the bay's valuable fisheries, tidal wetlands, and bird species. The Japanese Maritime Safety Agency concluded that the accident was caused by human error. According to the report, the vessel ran aground as it attempted to pass between two fishing boats by slowing down. With inadequate power, the vessel was pushed ashore by the tide and wind gusts.**Indonesia**

Indonesian Government Announces Widespread Tariff Cuts
July 8, 1997 - Source: CNA

In an attempt to improve efficiency and support multilateral trade agreements, the Indonesian government announced a plan to cut import tariffs, reduce local fees and taxes and support

importation of used fishing vessels and cargo. These actions, announced July 7 by the Coordinating Minister for Economy and Finance, will increase imports to Indonesia and deregulate industrial products and agricultural commodities. When the tariff cuts take affect, 62.55 percent of all tariff codes will fall between 0 and 10 percent, the Minister said. Indonesia will now have the region's second lowest un-weighted import tariff average, behind Singapore.**Laos**

Laos Renews Push for Dam Project
July 14, 1997 - Source: Bangkok Post

At the conclusion of the Third National Public Consultation on the Nam Theun 2 dam project, Laos reaffirmed its determination to move ahead with the US$1.5 billion project, despite strong reservations of the international community towards the economic, social, and environmental viability of the project."Nam Theun 2 dam is the best for Laos. The international community should give support to the project as it will be implemented with great care being given to environmental and social impacts," said Khammone Phonekeo, Vice Minister of the Ministry of Industry and Handicrafts. The proposed 680 megawatt dam is a build-own-operate-transfer project to be developed by the Laotian government in collaboration with Nam Theun 2 Electricity Consortium (NTEC) which involves Transfield Corp, Electricite de France and three Thai firms - Italian-Thai Development Plc, Jasmine International Plc and Phatra Thanakit Company. Most of the dam's electricity is to be exported to Thailand, beginning in 2004.The week-long workshop was held by the Lao government to elicit comment and review independent studies on the project by a selected group of participants from the "NGO community." The process is part of the government's requirements under World Bank guidelines. The World Bank, the projects main funder, has yet to approve funding for the project under pressure from regional and international NGOs who question the dam's economic viability, social transmigration issues, and the irreversible environmental damage the dam is set to cause.**Laos to Resettle One Third of Its Population**
July 9, 1997 - Source: South China Morning Post

The Lao government plans to relocate an estimated 300,000 rural families, about one third of the total population, by the year 2000, according to a recent UNESCO/UNDP report. However, according to the report, resettlement has already come at great expense. Drawing on a survey of 1,000 families in six provinces, the report found that the resettlement program has led to widespread impoverishment, social dislocation, and higher mortality rates for resettled peoples as the state has failed to give adequate assistance to populations adapting to low-land farming practices. The government justifies its resettlement program as a means to better manage its burgeoning population and to prevent 'unsustainable' forestry practices and watershed damage through 'slash-and-burn' agricultural practices. Dams, large scale forestry and infrastructure projects are other significant factors driving the program, according to the report.

Korea - ROK

Fishery Agreement Reached Between Korea and French Polynesia
July 9, 1997 - Source: Korea Herald

A July 8 statement by the Korean Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries reported new agreements reached between Korea and French Polynesia on issues such as Korea's tuna catch quotas in Polynesian waters and the size of fleets allowed to fish tuna. The agreement lowers the number of Korean fishing vessels from last year's 71 to 63. The reason for the reported drop, not only in fishing boats in operation, but fishing fees, comes from an 'unsatisfactory' 1996/1997 tuna fishing season, the Ministry said.**Malaysia**

Malaysian State and Federal Environmental Coordination Needed

July 11, 1997 -Source: Malaysia Star

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) has called for a change in federal environmental requirements which would require states to adopt environmental standards no lower than federal laws. The request from SAM responds to fear that states have conducted environmental impact assessments on such projects as the Bakun dam which do not meet federal standards.

Philippines

Environmental Disaster Strikes Philippine Resorts
July 9, 1997 - Source: Reuters

According to DENR Secretary Victor Ramos, 102 resorts on Boracay, a major tourist destination, are in danger of closure. The threats of closure come in response to detection of high levels of Colicorm bacteria -- which causes diarrhea, typhoid and skin diseases -- in the sea water as a result of pollution from human waste.

Taiwan - ROC

ROC Approves Nuclear Waste Plan
July 14, 1997 - Source: Associated Press

Taiwan's nuclear authority, The Atomic Energy Council, has approved plans to ship up to 200 barrels of radioactive waste to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The announcement comes in response to the Council's recent approval of the DPRK's design and environmental impact study for twin storage sites now being built. The highly controversial shipments are due to begin in September. Taipower claims the barrels contain mostly clothing exposed to radiation.

Rapid GDP Growth In Greater China
July 6, 1997 - Source: Central News Agency (Taiwan)

A recent report by the Council for Economic Planning and Development (CEPD) estimated that the gross domestic product (GDP) of Greater China (China, Hong Kong, Taiwan) will quadruple by 2010 to reach US$5.55. Per-capita GDP is also expected to quadruple by 2010 and will reach US$4,009 up from the 1996 level of US$1,001.

Talks With US on Taiwan's WTO Bid To Begin
July 11, 1997 - Source: CAN

Informal talks began July 13 between the US and Taiwan over Taiwan's desired entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO), according to the Board of Foreign Trade (BOFT). Among those in attendance are Robert Cassidy, assistant US Trade Representative (USTR), David Burns, senior USTR advisor, and Minister of Economic Affairs, Wang Chih-kang. Main issues to be discussed are disputes over intellectual property rights.

Thailand

Thailand Rethinks Energy Deal With Oman
July 15, 1997 - Source: Bangkok Post

Thai energy planners are wondering if they can indeed afford the liquefied natural gas (LNG) they agreed to purchase from Oman in June of last year. Economists are doubtful that Oman's LNG can meet the long-term energy needs of Thailand, according to the Bangkok Post report. Senior energy

officials, critical of the agreement with Oman, support competing sources such as natural gas from Indonesia and the Malaysia-Thailand Joint Development Area (JDA).

Thai Industry to Reduce Energy Consumption
July 10, 1997 - Source: The Bangkok Post

According to a July 10 report from the Thai Bureau of Energy Regulation and Conservation, industrial plants in Thailand must reduce their energy consumption by 547 megawatts within the next four years. An earlier study by the Science, Technology and Environment Ministry revealed that this plan would save up to 16 billion baht in Thai fuel costs annually in addition to the 24 billion baht that would have been needed to build a new power plant. According to Pramote Iamsiri, Director of the Bureau of Energy Regulation and Conservation, Thailand's 2,557 factories consuming over one megawatt of electricity will be especially targeted when the regulation takes effect July 17.

Artificial Coral Reefs for Thailand
July 6, 1997 - Source: Bangkok Post

This week, Thai Fisheries Department announced plans to spend over 1 billion baht on a series of artificial coral reefs in the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea. According to the report, it is hoped that the artificial reefs will attract declining fish populations.

Thailand to Buy Electricity From Burma
July 5, 1997 - Source: Bangkok Post

Under an agreement signed July 4 in Bangkok, Thailand will purchase up to 1,500 megawatts of electricity from Burma by 2010. The Burmese energy will be produced from hydropower and natural gas plants. Thai Minister, Sompong Amornvivat, acknowledged this step as a first toward further energy cooperation with Burma. The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand or other agencies are expected to buy the electricity through the support of Thai investors.

Thailand Floats the Baht
July 3, 1997 - Source: Bangkok Post

After spending $6 billion in recent months to defend the currency against speculators, the Thai Central Bank abandoned its 13-year-old exchange rate system in favor of a "managed float." Although wild fluctuations in the exchange rate, inflation, and other uncertainties are expected, the government expects Thailand to "reap the benefits" in the long-term with increased foreign investment and better terms in foreign debt repayment. According to some reports, the economic uncertainty of "freeing of the baht" coupled with the country's recent economic slowdown has brought into question three controversial energy projects: the planned liquified natural gas purchase from Oman; the Yandana Burma-Thai Gas pipeline and the Nam Theun 2 dam project in Laos. Foreign investors are now concerned over the projects' economic viability as the expected returns, based on a fixed exchange rate, will likely be lower than initially expected.

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