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Regional News

Canada Looks Abroad for Nukes after Shutdown
August 15, 1997 - Source: The Christian Science Monitor, New York Times

According to the Christian Science Monitor, CANDU (Canadian Deuterium Uranium) is seeking greater export possibilities in response to the announcement that the Canadian government plans to shut-down seven nuclear reactors (one-third of Canada's nuclear power production) because of costs and operating safety issues. According to CANDU officials, Korea, China, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia are all seeking nuclear technology from Canada. This may change, according to Kristen Ostling of the Campaign for Nuclear Phaseout, as the recent shutdowns are "going to give [these countries] something to think about."

Nations Agree to Share Costs in Controlling Haze
August 12-14, 1997 - Source: The Star, Straits Times, Reuters

Last week Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Brunei agreed to step up their efforts to control the ground and forest fires currently causing transportation and health problems throughout the region, according to a Star report. The eight hour meeting, held under the auspices of the ASEAN Task Force on trans-boundary haze pollution, resulted in Indonesia agreeing to use water bombers to suppress the fires and to strengthen enforcement against illegal forest fires. Later in the week,

according to the Star, Malaysian and Singaporean senior officials agreed to share the cost of providing the water bombers to Indonesia.

Indonesian Environment Minister, Surna Djajadiningrat , said strong action would be taken against those setting the illegal forest fires. Under current Indonesian law offender could face up to 10 years in prison and a fine of up to 100 million rupiah, according to the report. Indonesian officials claim the fires - which have been exacerbated by unusually dry conditions attributed to the El Nino effect - are started by entrepreneurs clearing forest land for plantation use.

US, Japan Key to Climate Talks
August 12, 1997 - Source: New York Times, Associated Press

At the conclusion of climate talks earlier this month in Bonn, the United States and Japan emerged as the two decisive players in reaching an agreement to curb greenhouse gas emissions, according to the New York Times. Japanese and American proposals are "the key to the success of the process," said Raul Estrada-Oyuela, the Argentine chairman of the U.N.-sponsored talks. Both countries are seen as pivotal players in the talks in light of their economic power and massive levels of greenhouse gas emissions. However, according to the report, both countries are increasingly seen as the 800 pound gorillas of the talks as they continue to drag their feet in adopting emission limits.

"Without the U.S., nothing will happen -- it is absolutely crucial," said Bert Metz, a climate negotiator from the Netherlands

According to the report, American negotiators in Bonn privately told a number of major countries that the Clinton administration was strongly committed to binding action and that his government was working to complete the specifics of its proposal. The Japanese took a similar approach, as Toshiaki Tanabe, the chief Japanese delegate in Bonn, acknowledged the concern about his country and the United States. Like the Americans, he said in an interview, Japan is "still in the process of working out our figures."

China

Environmentally protected cities recognized in China
August 15, 1997 - Source: China Daily

The Chinese National Environmental Protection Agency (Nepa), has initiated a program to reward model environmentally protected cities. The new program grants the honor to cities demonstrating improved environmental quality, rapid socio-economic growth, and progress in implementing sustainable development strategies. Zhangjiagang in the Jiangsu Province was the first city to earn the honor last year.

China looks to market reforms
August 7, 1997 - Source: The Associated Press

Earlier this month, President Jiang Zemin announced plans to rely on market forces to develop China’s economy. Jiang outlined a series of reforms which will, according to the report, bring China to a more competitive level and away from purely state-owned enterprise. Jiang’s suggestions include selling of assets to clear debt, privatizing shares of companies, listing shares on overseas stock markets and use of the South Korean and Japanese models of merging small weak enterprises with large, strong firms.

Chinese Foundation Promotes Environmentally Responsible Business
August 5, 1997 - Source: China Daily

To solve the problem of increasingly scarce funds for environmental projects, the Chinese Environmental Protection Foundation has proposed special funds to support businesses that produce environmentally friendly products. Foundation president, Qu Geping, has praised the 1 million yuan ($120,400) donation from Jiangsu Banshen Co Ltd and urges other companies to follow suit.

Chinese Firms Continue to Pollute
August 11, 1997 - Source: South China Morning Post

An August 10th report from the New China News Agency claims that 10,000 small firms are still in operation after being ordered to close in 1986. The Chinese State Environmental Protection Bureau (EPB) reports that 64,083 firms have indeed been shut down, representing 86 percent of the total closures ordered. Deputy director of the EPB, Wang Yuqing, reported that only 18 of China's 31 provinces have complied with the anti-pollution orders since 1986.

Mountain removed to make way for industrial park
August 7, 1997 - Source: The Wall Street Journal

A recent report by The Wall Street Journal describes how one man has decided to move a mountain. Mr. Zhu Qihua has financed a project in the city of Lanzhou aimed to alleviate the valley's severe air pollution by eroding Big Green Mountain down until it becomes a plain, according to the report. Upon completion of the project, Zhu plans to build a new industrial park on the site of the former mountain. Zhu has gotten around local construction bans by appealing to citizens of Lanzhou, desperate for relief from the smog that covers the city 250 days a year. Local environmental officials have gone along with the project despite concerns that removing the mountain will simply widen the pollution basin. According to Yu Xionghou, Lanzhou's city environmental director, "there are rows and rows of mountains. You remove one mountain, and you've just linked Lanzhou with another valley. It's not that easy to solve our environmental problem".

Indonesia

Suharto to Win "Strongman Powers"
August 19, 1997 - Source: South China Morning Post

Later this week the Indonesian Parliament is set to reactivate a decree which would give President Suharto extra powers to act against "subversion and security threats," according the South China Morning Post. The decree, originally issued in 1966, would give the President the authority to act against threats to the 1945 constitution, or to the state ideology, pancasila. According to the report, Suharto did not ask the assembly to reactivate the decree, but merely to consider it.

Indonesia to Deploy Jets to Protect Gas Field
August 12, 1997 - Source: Straits Times

The Indonesian government announced last week that it will deploy six reconnaissance aircraft to protect its Natuna gas project in the South China Sea. The aircraft, recently purchased from Australia, will support existing naval patrols in protecting the disputed area near the conflict-prone Spratly Islands. A part of the lucrative Natuna project lies in a disputed "grey area" claimed by both Indonesia and China. The project, with estimated gas reserves of 6.3 trillion cu m, is being developed by the state owned Pertamina oil and gas company, Exxon, Mobil Oil and several Japanese companies. Last year, Indonesia sent a strong signal to China when the military carried out its largest ever combined armed forces exercise around the disputed islands.

Japan

Japan offers tax breaks as emissions reduction incentive
August 19, 1997 - Source: The Daily Yomiuri

In an effort to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, the Japanese Transport Ministry has announced tax incentives for the purchase of new high-efficiency autos available this fall. The new cars combine use of batteries and gasoline engines and reduce average emissions by one half, according to the report. Already, tax breaks are offered for alternative-fuel vehicles such as electric and methanol-powered cars. The tax breaks currently in place for manufacturers are to be tightened in 2001 and will now aim at diesel-engine vehicles as well. The Transport Ministry also plans a tax break based on vehicle fuel efficiency that will be based on manufacturers' state of technology in their 1998 proposals.

Japan and ROK Fishery Negotiations Fail
August 19, 1997 - Source: The Daily Yomiuri

Bilateral fishery talks between Japan and South Korea have reached an impasse due to South Korean violations of previous agreements, a Daily Yomiuri report says. The latest incident, involving South Korean dragnetting, occurred 16 nautical miles west of Japan's Ikishima island and prompted an official warning from Japanese Fisheries Supervisor Kuniomi Maeda. Madea said, "We'll have to officially warn the Korean patrol boat...They should know that frequent warnings will weaken South Korea's position at the negotiating table". The August 14th talks failed to reach agreement.

ROK-Japan Territorial Waters Dispute
August 16, 1997 - Source: Chosun Ilbo
(NAPSNet Report - http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet)

A Japanese local district court in Hamada, Shimane Prefecture, on Friday dismissed the case of Captain Kim Sung-ki of the ship Daedongho, who had been indicted under the suspicion of illegal fishing. Chief Judge Yasahiro Hasakawa said that since the Japanese constitution stipulates respect for international
treaties, the ROK-Japan Fishery Agreement must be upheld. Captain Kim, freed promptly by the decision, is expected to arrive in the ROK next Monday. The court said the fishery accord stipulates that when and if the content of the agreement is to be changed the party must inform and acquire consent from the other country. The Japanese Government unilaterally had set a straight base line without the consent of the ROK government.

Malaysia

Malaysia to enforce ban on illegal incineration
August 16, 1997 - Source: The Star

In light of the recent haze problem in Malaysia, the Department of Energy (DOE) has banned all forms of open burning with plans to enforce the new law stringently. Along with the ban on illegal incineration, the DOE air quality plan involves promoting use of catalytic converters cleaner fuel.

Malaysian industries urged to seek cleaner production
August 14, 1997 - Source: The Star

To avoid the cost of treating hazardous waste and to reduce the amount of waste entering landfills, the Malaysian Department of Energy (DOE) has issued a statement urging industries to reduce waste in initial stages of production. Along with this effort, the DOE is prepared to fine industries who do not take steps to reduce waste and clean up production, according to the report. Raja Rokiah Raja Saigon, DOE director, said that Malaysian industry will be uncompetitive in the world market due to growing waste disposal costs unless steps are taken toward waste reduction.

'Malaysia Should Lead APEC's Ecotech Agenda'
August 13, 1997 - Source: The Star (Malaysia)

At a recent conference, Japanese Economist, Ippei Yamazawa, called on Malaysia to take the leadership role in spearheading the economic and technology cooperation (Ecotech) agenda when it hosts the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum next year. "I am quite confident that Malaysia can play a catalyst role in making a breakthrough with the implementation of projects which have already been identified, hence making the Ecotech agenda more result-oriented," said Professor Yamazawa of Japan's Hototsubashi University.

Professor Yamazawa said the Ecotech agenda's 320 projects have yet to take off, warning that Malaysia should avoid the approach taken this year in Canada, perpetuating APEC as just another "talk shop." The ecotech agenda, along with trade and investment liberalization, make up APEC's "two pillars" of cooperation. The agenda includes efforts on marine resource conservation, tourism, fisheries, transportation, telecommunications, economic infrastructure and agriculture. The remarks were made at a recent lecture organized by the Japan Cultural Centre, Kuala Lumpur and the Centre for Japan Studies.

'Non-tariff Barriers are a Growing Threat'
August 12, 1997 - Source: The Star

According to Malaysian International Trade and Industry Minister, Rafidah Aziz, although WTO efforts to liberalize markets has resulted in the lowering of tariffs, non-tariff barriers, such as labor or environmental standards, are taking their place as impediments to access to developed country markets. "Trade conditionalities and arbitrary changes to rules of origin are used as instruments for protection, " and there is a "noticeable trend" to use environment as "a front for trade protectionism," said the Minister. The remarks were made at the opening of the 1997 MITI Counsellor conference.

Malaysia Delays "Mega" Projects
August 13,15 - Source: Straits Times

The Straits Times reported that many of Malaysia's "mega" projects will be suspended due to the recent fall of the ringgit, widely seen as a result of speculative attacks. According to Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, the government will delay projects that have not yet started and were not considered "critical" or strategic to national interests. The withdrawal of foreign funds and the country's growing trade deficit were also cited as motives for delaying the projects. The announcement offered Prime Minister Mahatir another chance to lash out at currency speculators. "These avaricious speculators do not care what they do to the people because they are backed by big powers and they think destroying the economy of a developing country is great fun," said the Prime Minister.

Electricity prices expected to decrease in Malaysia
August 12, 1997 - Source: The Star Online

Because of greater energy efficiency, Malaysian Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Leo Moggie reported that Malaysian energy prices are expected to drop. At the recent Asia Pacific Conference on Operation and Planning Issues in the Emerging Electric Utility Environment, Mr. Moggie reported that the new system to detect faults in the energy system will "operate more efficiently, economically and safely".

Bakun Circumvents Federal Environmental Laws

August 11, 1997 - Source: Environmental News Service

The Environmental News Service (ENS) reported last week that Malaysia's controversial Bakun dam will go ahead without reference to the nation's Environmental Quality Act (EQA). According to the report, the Malaysian Court of Appeal overturned the ruling of the Kuala Lumpur High Court which directed
the company responsible for the dam's construction, Ekran Berhad, to comply with federal environmental laws in the implementation of the Bakun Hydro-electric Project (HEP). The ruling was overturned on grounds that the EQA did not apply to the Bakun project as the land in which the dam is being built is owned by the State of Sarawak. See Connectivity No. 7

Marshall Islands

Marshall Islands nuclear waste storage plan meets Hawaiian opposition

August 14, 1997 - Source: Marshall Islands Journal

A recent Honolulu City Council resolution against nuclear waste storage in the Marshall Islands was yet another reminder of the region's opposition to the proposed nuclear waste storage site on the Marshall Islands. According to the report, opposition to the plan from neighboring Pacific Island nations, Hawaii, and within the Marshall Islands should be enough to freeze feasibility studies of the nuclear waste storage site. However, according to Jaluit Senator Alvin Jacklick, the involvement of the major American corporation B&W Nuclear Environmental Services means that the proposal is still on the table.

Philippines

Philippines to Protect against Bio-Prospecting

August 14, 1997 - Source: The Straits Times

In response to mounting complaints that foreign companies are patenting local herbal and medicinal plants illegally, the Philippine government has ordered all permits and contracts to collect biological and genetic materials to be terminated by August 31st 1997, the Straits Times reported last week. According to a Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) statement, "No bio-prospecting activity shall be allowed without the required academic or research agreement" after the end of August.

Philippine law requires that profits gained from using biological and genetic resources for commercial or scientific purposes are to be shared with the government, however, officials claim the decree was more than a question of "just compensation." "The recognition of intellectual property rights should be considered a basic human right and an incentive for innovation within local communities just like in the commercial sector," a DENR official concluded.

Philippines Arrests Chinese and Taiwanese Fishermen in Disputed Waters

August 12, 15, 18 - Source: Central News Agency, Reuters

The Philippines has recently asserted jurisdiction over what they claim to be their territorial waters by arresting foreign fishermen on several separate occasions. The first incident occurred on August 10th when a Taiwanese fishing crew was arrested and fined for poaching just north of the Luzon Strait. On August 12th, 23 mainland Chinese were arrested for fishing off the island of Palawan, claimed by the Philippines and mainland China, among others. A Reuters report claims that China has called for the release of the Chinese fishermen warning that the Philippines is running the risk of ruining the 'friendly relations' between the two countries.

Taiwan (ROK)

Taipei's Buses Moving Toward Clean Natural Gas
August 16, 1997 - Source: CNA

The city of Taipei, in efforts to control air pollution, has announced plans to purchase six buses that run on clean natural gas (CNG), according to a CNA report. The Taipei Bureau of Transportation (TBT) plans to expand use of the buses to 60 in five years with the goal of gradually replacing its diesel bus fleet, reported TBT director Ho Cheng-tan.

Taiwan's energy demand grows with industrial sector
August 13, 1997 - Source: CNA

Taiwan's demand for electricity, oil and other energy resources is on the rise, says Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA). The rise is due to industrial growth which is dependent on resources such as crude oil, liquified natural gas and coal that rose 7.62 percent in 1996 alone. Taiwan, according to the report, has made up for the rise in demand by increasing energy imports by 3.32 percent

Taiwan's Rubbish Problem
August 13, 1997 - Source: CNA

Taiwan is producing 70 percent more waste than it did ten years ago, the Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics (DGBAS) reported Tuesday. The DGBAS reported that Taiwan's average per-capita is also dramatically higher than previous years with daily garbage production at 1.3 kg. This is in comparison to Britain's 0.96 kg, Germany's 0.99 kg and Japan's 1.2 kg per capita rubbish production. This report points to the great environmental threat that waste disposal, along with population growth, poses to the island of Taiwan. Incineration is quickly replacing landfills where 90 percent of Taiwan's garbage was stored until 1994.

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