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WORLD NEWS

By Jane Garrido, Catherine Landers,
and Cari Shiffman*

AFRICA

POSSIBLE INCREASED ILLNESSES AND DEATHS LEAD TO PHASE OUT OF LEADED FUEL

Health experts in Kenya have warned that the continued usage of leaded fuel in the region could increase the number of deaths from respiratory illnesses.¹ Top environmental scientists with the United Nations Environment Programme (“UNEP”) concluded that Nairobi, Kenya is one of the most highly polluted cities in the world, in part due to the vehicles and leaded fuel used in the city.² Leaded fuel exacerbates the problem by destroying the catalytic converters in vehicles, which normally act as pollution guards.³

As many countries in Africa still use leaded gasoline, the continent is severely affected by lead poisoning and pollution.⁴ Moreover, Africa’s pervasive dust formations, which disperse concentrations of lead and increase the probability of exposure, exacerbate this problem.⁵ Lead pollution poses many serious health risks.⁶ More people in the region are being exposed to lead poisoning because of the increased number of vehicles, in part due to the growth of the urban populations.⁷ To address this problem, UNEP has begun a campaign to phase out leaded fuel in Africa by encouraging drivers to use unleaded fuel.⁸

FOOD SHORTAGES MAY HAVE SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH HIV/AIDS

The Zambian National Food and Nutrition Commission (“NFNC”) has reported that people living with HIV/AIDS in the region could be severely affected by a food deficit.⁹ Alternatively, the Zambian government in past years has blamed food shortages on the HIV/AIDS pandemic.¹⁰ Nutrition is essential for slowing HIV’s progression into full-blown AIDS.¹¹ Additionally, the effects could be very severe for those on anti-retroviral therapy because, according to the NFNC, “the build up of toxins from the medication will not be deterred and this could be fatal.”¹²

Zambia is ranked among the countries with a high rate of malnutrition.¹³ According to the United Nations Development Programme (“UNDP”), about sixteen percent of Zambia’s adult population is living with HIV.¹⁴ UNDP stresses that HIV/AIDS is “the most critical development and humanitarian crisis Zambia faces today.”¹⁵ The NFNC emphasized that maintaining proper nutrition was crucial for caring for people living HIV/AIDS.¹⁶

AMERICAS

U.S. CONGRESS VOTES TO OPEN THE ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE TO OIL DRILLING

By a vote of 51-49, the United States Senate voted on March 16, 2005 against removing a provision in the 2006 budget resolution that will allow drilling in the ecologically sensitive Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska.¹⁷ Proponents say that oil companies will eventually be able to extract up to one millions barrels of oil a day from Alaska’s northern coastal plain.¹⁸ However, opponents argue that drilling will not significantly reduce the United States’ dependence on foreign oil and will harm caribou, polar bears, and millions of migratory birds in the refuge.¹⁹ The Senate and House must still agree on a final version of the budget before the legislation becomes law.²⁰

BRAZIL CAPTURES SUSPECT IN CONSERVATIONIST SLAYING; PRESIDENT PROTECTS AMAZON LANDS IN AREA OF SLAYING

Police arrested landowner Vitalmiro Bastos de Moura, the man accused of ordering the slaying of American missionary nun Sister Dorothy Stang.²¹ Stang was shot February 12, 2005 in Para, Brazil, allegedly in retaliation for her outspoken efforts to protect peasants and wildlife in the Amazon.²²

Stang worked with poor farmers in the Amazon to protect the rainforest from encroachment by wealthy ranchers.²³ About three years ago, Brazilian land reform laws granted approximately 173,000 acres rich in mahogany and cedar to peasant farmers.²⁴ The land attracted the attention of loggers and corporate landowners, who allegedly made death threats against the peasant farmers seeking to protect it.²⁵

In an effort to fight deforestation and land conflicts in the state where Stang was murdered, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio da Silva signed a decree creating two major protected areas in the Amazon.²⁶ Together, the 8.15 million acre forest reserve Terra do Meio Ecological Station and the 1.1 million acre Serra do Pardo National Park established by the decree make up an area twice the size of Massachusetts.²⁷

CLIMATE CHANGE WILL IMPACT GREAT LAKES AGRICULTURE

A new report from the University of Illinois and the Union of Concerned Scientists (“UCS”) warns that a warming climate will harm agriculture in the Great Lakes region.²⁸ *Impacts on*

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Agriculture: Our Region's Vital Economic Sector, a report issued by the UCS in March, suggests that changes in precipitation, rainfall, ozone concentrations, and pests and pathogens will disrupt current farming practices throughout the region.²⁹ Maximum daily temperatures could rise by five to twenty degrees in the Great Lakes region.³⁰ Drought frequency will likely increase, and by the end of the century UCS researchers say Illinois summers could resemble the arid conditions of east Texas.³¹

ASIA

ECONOMIC GROWTH IN CHINA HAS IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

China's Development Research Center ("DRC") forecasts that China's economy will exceed the think-tank's routine expectation of a growth rate of seven percent, and forecasts instead that China will grow at an average annual rate of eight percent from 2006 to 2010.³² The DRC reports that the principal factors contributing to this increased growth forecast are accelerated urbanization and higher consumption in houses, cars, and home appliances.³³ However, as China seeks to maintain this growth, concerns remain that with rapid economic growth there will be greater pressure on the nation's resources, energy, and the environment.³⁴ Economists at the DRC warned that there could be severe consequences for the environment unless the country shifts away the present resource-intensive model of economic growth.³⁵

POPULATION GROWTH IN THE PHILIPPINES MAY CONTRIBUTE TO FOOD DEFICITS

More people are suffering from hunger in the Philippines than in most of the country's East Asian neighbors.³⁶ Recent statistics show that 23 percent of Filipinos are living below the minimum level of dietary energy consumption, compared to nine percent in China, eighteen percent in Vietnam, and six percent in Indonesia.³⁷ The average annual population growth rate in the Philippines is 2.36 percent, and at this rate the country will double its size in less than thirty years.³⁸ This rapid population growth is thought to be a key contributor to the food shortage problem.³⁹

However, researchers at Cornell University concluded that population growth does not cause hunger, but rather that poverty and inequality were the main contributors.⁴⁰ Still, a follow-up study, conducted by an ecologist at the University of Michigan, showed that inequality and poverty were the key factors for rapid population growth.⁴¹ A slower growing popu-

lation may mean increased savings for basic education and health services, which could lead to improvements in the rural sector, especially in agricultural development, which could help alleviate food shortages.⁴²

EURASIA

SHELL SAYS DANGER TO RARE WHALES WILL NOT STOP SAKHALIN-2 GAS PROJECT

John Barry, Russia Country Manager for Shell, told Reuters in an interview on February 25, 2005, that fear for the future of the endangered Western grey whales will not halt the Shell-led Sakhalin-2 gas project in Russia from moving forward.⁴³ Shell expects it will be ready to deliver its first cargo of Liquefied Natural Gas ("LNG") on schedule in 2007.⁴⁴

In response to concerns raised by the International Whaling Commission that Sakhalin-2 threatens to kill the approximately one hundred remaining Western gray whales near Russia's Pacific Coast, Shell commissioned an environmental report on the project.⁴⁵ Barry told Reuters that a recommendation from the report that Shell stop the project to evaluate its impacts on the whales had been misconstrued.⁴⁶ Shell wants to be clear that the project is going ahead, though it recognizes environmentalists' concerns and is considering re-routing the pipelines, amongst other mitigation measures, to avoid damaging the whales' habitat.⁴⁷

Shell had recently announced that it signed up buyers for 70 percent of its planned capacity of 9.6 million tons of LNG, and plans to sell the remaining volumes before the end of 2005.⁴⁸ Shell sees Sakhalin-2 as a key project that can help it rebuild investor confidence after admitting last year that it had exaggerated oil reserves.⁴⁹ Opponents fear the project will negatively affect the world's last remaining Western grey whales, damage the marine environment, and threaten the livelihood of tens of thousands of fishermen.⁵⁰

MIDDLE EAST

WORLD BANK GIVES IRAQ GRANT TO HELP ADDRESS WATER SHORTAGES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

In December 2004, the World Bank signed a \$20 million grant agreement with the Interim Government of Iraq for an Emergency Community Infrastructure Rehabilitation Project.⁵¹ The goal of the project is to provide water to low-income rural communities by improving water supply, sanitation, irrigation, and drainage systems.⁵² It will fund repair of water infrastruc-

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ture networks in Iraq's rural areas through labor intensive, small-scale, civil works programs.⁵³ The Bank says that the project will create employment opportunities in poor communities.⁵⁴

The agricultural and rural economies of Iraq are responsible for 87 percent of Iraq's water use.⁵⁵ However, only 46 percent of people in the rural areas have access to potable water.⁵⁶ Many in rural communities do not have access to safe sewage facilities and as a result, rural communities have experienced a dramatic rise in waterborne diseases.⁵⁷ Iraq's Minister of Water Resources, Dr. Latif Rashid, commented that "[t]his signing is the first step towards a continuous cooperation with the World Bank...Iraq is in dire need of development and rehabilitation and the sooner these projects are off the ground, the better it is for the Iraqi people."⁵⁸

The Emergency Community Infrastructure Rehabilitation Project is financed through the Iraq Trust Fund, a multi-donor trust fund administered by the World Bank.⁵⁹ As of December 2004, donors had contributed approximately \$400 million to the Trust.⁶⁰

SCIENTISTS HOPEFUL ABOUT RESTORING IRAQ'S MARSHLAND

The Mesopotamian marshlands of Southern Iraq, home to a 5,000 year-old Marsh Arab culture and once a center of rich biodiversity, are gradually being restored after decades of damming

and draining.⁶¹ Surprisingly clean water flowing through the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to the marshlands is washing away toxic salts that had built up in the area.⁶² Curtis Richardson of Duke University, who is observing the recovery of the marshlands along with colleagues from Canada and Iraq, believes it is possible to restore 30 percent of the marshland area.⁶³

The marshlands were once the permanent habitat of millions of birds and an important stop for millions of birds that migrate between Africa and Siberia.⁶⁴ During the 1990s more than 90 percent of the marshlands were destroyed by the diversion of water for cities upstream⁶⁵ and agricultural irrigation.⁶⁶ Saddam Hussein also had ordered deliberate draining of the area in retaliation for the Marsh Arab's uprising after the First Gulf War, further contributing to the degradation of the area.⁶⁷

Since the end of Saddam's regime, Marsh Arabs have begun to return to the area and have destroyed dams in order to re-flood the region.⁶⁸ Approximately twenty percent of the marshland has now been re-flooded, causing the return of thousands of birds, as well as the smooth-coated otters.⁶⁹ However, scientists are still concerned about the future of the marshlands.⁷⁰ The Iranian government plans to construct a dike on its border with Iraq, which will divert water away from the marshland area.⁷¹



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