



RESOURCE SECURITY WATCH

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Related Categories: Africa; China

CHINESE POLLUTION PROVOKES LEGAL PROTEST

Chinese lawyer Cheng Hai, among others, is suing the government in Beijing for damages due to extreme air pollution. Beijing's average reading of tiny particulate matter (which provides a good approximate measurement for air quality) is seven times higher than levels deemed safe by the World Health Organization.

Cheng's claim against the PRC is part of a gathering grassroots political movement. Other lawyers have initiated similar legal actions against the provincial governments of Hebei province and Tianjin city. It is also a sign of the ongoing difficulties facing the PRC in fighting pollution; despite massive investments (to the tune of \$2.7 billion this year alone), poor air quality continues to pose a significant risk to the health of Chinese citizens, especially children. (The Economist, March 2, 2017, Associated Press, March 2, 2017)

A LESS DESIRABLE ASIAN EXPORT

Meanwhile, the effects of Asian pollution are being felt beyond the region. A new report published in the journal Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics notes that although the United States is now producing less air pollution, pollutants generated in Asia are traveling across the Pacific and impacting air quality in the western United States. The study examined ground-level ozone, a significant contributor to smog, from 1980 to 2014, and found that pollution originating in Asia contributed up to 65 percent of the increase of Western ozone in recent years. (National Public Radio, March 3, 2017)

THE MOST VULNERABLE COHORT

According to the World Health Organization, 1.7 million children die every year from environmental factors, primarily poor sanitation and contaminated water. All told, according to two new WHO studies, more than one in four deaths of children under age 5 are attributable to environmental hazards. Approximately 570,000 of those deaths come from respiratory infections such as pneumonia, which can be caused by indoor and outdoor pollution. A further 361,000 children under 5 die every year from diarrhea, which thrives in poor sanitary conditions. Moreover, the WHO reports, these threats are not confined to developing countries, but affect nations around the world. (Washington Post, March 5, 2017)

ARCTIC NATIONS DEBATE OCEAN RIGHTS

In early March, delegations from the United States, Norway, Denmark, Russia, and Canada - along with representatives from five of the largest fishing jurisdictions in the world - met in Reykjavík, Iceland. The focus of their discussion was the future of the Arctic region, and their respective rights in it. Arctic ice melt is expanding the size of the Arctic Ocean; by this September, it is estimated that nearly 4 million squares miles of previously-frozen ice will have turned into open water, widening commercial traffic lanes and facilitating access to the Arctic in the process. Moreover, much of the Arctic Ocean does not currently fall under any national jurisdiction, allowing any interested party potential access for fishing and commercial activities in its waters. The commercial agreements and regulations governing the region have therefore become hotly-contested, and strategically important. (The Atlantic, March 17, 2017)

AFRICAN FAMINE AT RISK OF SPREADING

The famine declared in February 2017 in South Sudan rages on, and three more nations may be at risk of famine themselves. Yemen, gripped by civil war, Saudi air bombings and a trade embargo have caused food prices to spike, which in turn has led to mass malnutrition. In Nigeria, meanwhile, Islamist group Boko Haram continues to operate in the country's northeast, and a lack sanitation and hygiene services has contributed to the spread of diseases like diarrhea and cholera. And in Somalia, half of the national population faces acute food insecurity, and 438,000 Somalis have been displaced since November 2016 (with more than 3,000 people are being displaced in search of water and food per day). (New York Times, March 27, 2017; ReliefWeb, March 29, 2017)