

# News Round-up

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## **Shifting sands**

Building sand castles on the beach may be fun, but building a whole country out of sand? Not funny, as Singapore and Indonesia are discovering.

Indonesia has banned sand exports to its tiny neighbour, saying that some of its islands are being stripped bare as Singapore tries to grow more land. A decade-long squabble between the island republic and

Indonesia over what seemingly ought to be an inexhaustible commodity has escalated, with Jakarta suddenly slapping a permanent ban on sand exports and risking another setback in the oft-strained relations with its nearest neighbour.

The move is no laughing matter for the wealthy island State, which has built big chunks of its metropolis on Indonesian sand and desperately wants more. Constrained by

water on all sides, Singapore believes it must continue to grow physically as well as economically. At the very tip of Malaysia, the country is otherwise almost completely surrounded by Indonesia across the Singapore Strait. Jakarta is becoming concerned that as sand is stripped off for sale from tiny islands, the geography of the country is changing and Singapore will actually encroach the islets that make up its geographical boundary in the strait.

In 1960, the entire island State was only 581.5 sq km. It has since grown to some 650 sq km and expects to grow by another 100 sq km by 2030 if it can find the firmament. Mari Pangestu, Indonesia's feisty trade minister, has had enough. She banned the exports, saying the decision is necessary to protect the environment and maintain her country's maritime borders.

## **Zones harm**

Some zones may be special but they could be harmful as well. That is what some marginalized communities in India are finding out. An Indian law meant to

promote economic development is causing environmental damage and harming

the livelihoods of some of the nation's poorest people, so it should be repealed or greatly revised.

This is among the conclusions of a report released by the International Institute for Environment and Development and Winrock International India on the eve of an international conference on the role of natural resources in sustainable development.

The report was compiled after a meeting of over 70 participants, including members of India's Parliament, State Biodiversity Boards and Planning Commission, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), local communities, research institutes and international donors.

It calls on the Indian government to implement policies to protect the

environment and local livelihoods, to repeal or significantly alter laws that promote unsustainable development, and to ensure that poor people have a greater say in how the environmental resources they depend upon are managed.

The report highlights the way that Special Economic Zones—which are treated as foreign territory in order to make exports easier—are exempt not only from taxes but also from stringent environmental and labour regulations.

## **Legal eagle**

Those who wish to be eagle-eyed about legal matters that affect fisheries and coastal communities worldwide, now have a ready reckoner—the *International Legal Instruments Relevant*

*to Fisheries and Fishing Communities*. Brought out by the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), this compendium is now available online at <http://legal.icsf.net/>.

The website provides detailed information for a wide range of instruments relevant to fisheries and fishworkers. It covers 124 legal instruments, categorized into the following seven themes: Human Rights, Food Security, Women and Development; Environment and Sustainable Development; Oceans and Fisheries Management; Environmental Pollution; Fishing Vessels and Safety at Sea; Labour; and Trade.

The site also offers other useful documents on international legal instruments, and a listing of related events/ announcements and news, as well as a timeline tracing the chronology of the various instruments thematically. The search feature on the site offers both simple and advanced functions, which allows users to call up the relevant article/paragraph for the particular keyword searched.

### **Green gaps**

Tourists love beaches and coastal delights. But are they giving back to the environment as much as they are extracting from it? Not quite, says the International Tourism Partnership.

The tourism industry could do more to help protect the

marine and coastal ecosystems on which it relies, according to the January edition of *greenhotelier*. Exploring the value of natural assets such as coral reefs, mangrove forests, whales, dolphins, manatees, sea turtles, reef fish and other marine organisms, the magazine examines how tourism contributes to the degradation of marine and coastal environments and how its members can help redress the balance.

*Protecting our coastal and marine environments* looks at the vulnerability of coastal and marine ecosystems to threats such as climate change and tourism-related development.

Issues include overfishing and destructive fishing techniques, land and mangrove clearance for construction, intensive prawn farming and agriculture, sedimentation, water pollution and damage from boats and other marine recreation activities, high nutrient loading from improperly treated waste water, and increased solid

waste from imported packaged food and drinks.

There are strong economic incentives for the tourism industry to be more proactive not only to avoid stressing the natural assets from which it benefits financially but also because it is known that protection of coral reefs and mangroves costs far less than neglect. Governments, planners, developers, hotel associations, cruise lines and other tourism industry operators need to work together with community members and adopt integrated coastal zone management strategies, says the report.

### **Fuel fire**

Fishermen around the world have to confront the problem posed by increasingly rising costs of fuel for their fishing vessels. So any alternative is seen as worth exploring. These days, fuel from biological sources are all the rage. But not without worry as biodiesel sweeps **China** in controversy.

Everyone seems eager to get a share of China's biofuels pie, reports Jiao Li for Renewable Energy Access.

Liang Yulin, a 28-year-old real estate tycoon in southern China's Guangzhou City, began investing in biodiesel

production last October. Using palm oil imported from Southeast Asia, the manager of the Guangzhou Tinyo Real Estate Development Company plans to turn out 50 tons a day, selling the fuel to fishing boats that work around the Pear River Delta.

Although he has yet to see returns from his new investment, Liang says he will keep persevering. And he is not alone to venture in this seemingly promising industry. "As far as I know, there are dozens of biodiesel companies just in Guangzhou," he said.

Even the latest price cut in the international oil market does not seem to dampen Chinese enthusiasm for the new energy resource.

Leading the game are a variety of government-supported demonstration projects.

While calling for biofuel standards and regulations, however, many experts also worry about the land use of the oil crops. Clearly, unless these issues are sorted out, fishermen can not hope to fill their tanks with biofuels.