Tackling China's Pollution Black Spot

CHINA

Photo: Reuter/Aflo

Shanxi Province is the center of China's coal industry. It is also the country's environmental black spot. China's 10 worst polluted cities are located there. Rivers run black with pollutants and citizens routinely complain of choking coal dust emitted from traditional coal-fired power plants. However, a little help may be on the way. With a JICA-approved soft loan, four high-tech Japanese companies are building one of the world's most environmentally friendly pumped-storage hydroelectric power plant which is scheduled to come online in the summer of 2009. The plant makes use of two water reservoirs at different levels to generate electricity, but it emits no carbon dioxide and has a low environmental impact.

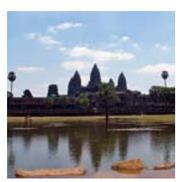
Cyclone Nargis Aftermath

MYANMAR

It was the deadliest natural disaster in the country's recent history. An estimated 130,000 people died when Cyclone Nargis smashed into Myanmar in May 2008, and since then JICA has been assisting with a series of humanitarian programs to help the country recover. In one unusual project a team of Japanese experts recently conducted a bathymetric survey of the riverbed at Yangon Port to trace an estimated 30 ships sunk there during the storm. The bulk of the country's imports and exports pass through Yangon, and it is imperative to locate and then clear away the wreckage as quickly as possible to restore the country's economic health.

Saving Angkor

CAMBODIA



It is one of the world's most famous tourist spots. Built in the twelfth century and rediscovered in the nineteenth, Cambodia's Angkor temple complex today attracts 2 million visitors annually. Some experts believe that the collapse of the ancient kingdom resulted from environmental over-exploitation in the thirteenth century and worry that a similar phenomenon could be underway again. Buildings are being thrown up helter-skelter in the nearby town of Siem-Reap to satisfy the tourist influx. At least 1 million tons of human wastewater is being deposited in the soil each year. There is totally inadequate sewage. JICA surveyed the region in 2004–06 and drew up a blueprint for environmentally friendly, sustainable community development, and Japanese expert Tetsuji Goto is now working closely with the provincial government to implement the recommendations.

Cool Earth Loan

INDONESIA

Global warming is normally associated with gas-guzzling vehicles in the United States or belching power plants in China, the world's top two emitters of greenhouse gases. Indonesia, however, is in the No. 3 spot, principally because of emissions from an unusual source—forest fires and deforestation. The vast nation of 235 million people stretching across more than 17,000 islands is not only a major contributor to climate change but is also a serious victim with increased drought, floods, food insecurity and health threats. Japan has made what it calls 'Cool Earth' a major foreign policy aim, and JICA recently announced its first climate change program loan to a developing country with an estimated US$300 million earmarked for Indonesia. The agency is also dispatching an advisory and monitoring team to evaluate Indonesia's ongoing environmental initiatives.

New Solutions Needed

JAPAN

"Creative and effective solutions" are needed to tackle the "complex, diverse and ever-changing" problems facing millions of the world's most vulnerable people, according to JICA President Sadako Ogata. Speaking at a recent Washington seminar, Mrs. Ogata said one of the most fundamental methods of helping developing countries is to promote a "virtuous cycle of economic growth and poverty reduction"—in other words encouraging a combination of both overall economic growth through infrastructure projects and national programs in addition to promoting specific projects to aid communities in such areas as health and education.