India

Closure of Polluting Factories

On 7 December 2000, the Supreme Court ordered the New Delhi government to shut down 125,000 polluting factories within four weeks.

The Court heard arguments in the case seeking relocation or closure of the industries in question. The Delhi government has refused to carry out several previous such orders, dating back to 1985. The three-judge bench ruled that this order would not be affected by any stay or injunction granted by any other court.

Already on the 14 November, the Supreme Court had ordered officials of the New Delhi government to implement its earlier orders to shut down nearly all of the 125,000 polluting installations. Government officials did start to close down the units, which led to civil unrest in the capital. Hundreds of thousands of angry factory workers protesting against the closure set scores of government vehicles on fire. As a result, the government has appealed to the Supreme Court to allow more time to relocate these industrial units, which is expected to affect the livelihood of an estimated 2 million workers.

However, this time the Supreme Court refused to move on their decision, having already extended three times since 1996 the deadline for the Delhi government to take the requisite action.

Germany

Sustainable Development Council

Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder announced, on 21 February 2001, the launch of a Sustainable Development Council to help the federal Government with its environmental policy.

The Assembly will have 16 members, representing the economic, scientific, environmental and consumer protection sectors. A government spokesman has said that the Commission of State Secretaries for Sustainable Development, whose creation was previously agreed upon, will be up and running in March this year under the supervision of the State Minister, Hans-Martin Bury.

The Council will help to determine a long-term sustainable federal development strategy, which the Commission of State Secretaries will then use to prepare and table proposals to the Government. The authorities want to have a national strategy defined by 2002 in time to unveil it in Johannesburg, during the Earth Summit 2002.

Norway

Exports of Whale Products

On 16 January, the Norwegian Government announced that it was going to authorise whale meat and whale fat exports again, despite the international moratorium on the hunting of whales. The Minister for Fisheries declared that the decision resulted from a new assessment based on scientific criteria.

This decision goes against the European Union and individual Member States’ position expressed at the time of the CITES Convention meeting (Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species). Community legislation forbids any sale of whale meat or products derived from whales being sold in the European Union market place.

Even if the action now announced by Norway is not specifically ruled out by CITES itself, given that Norway had expressed reservations about the moratorium, they are still are going completely against the position supported by the EU and Member States, and against Community