**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 marketplace.

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 going completely against the position supported by the EU and Member States, and against Community
legislation validated in European law, which concerns not only the provisions of CITES but also those of the Habitats Directive (on the protection of endangered wild fauna and flora species).

Norway stated that the sale of whale meat and other products derived from these cetaceans would be to countries that had expressed reservations about placing whales on the endangered species list in 1983. At present, the three other countries who have expressed such reservations are Japan, Iceland and Peru. Predictably, Japan was pleased by the Norwegian decision and is likely to become the biggest customer for the products.

France

New Agencies on Environmental Health and Nuclear Safety

Parliament voted on 6 February to create a new agency charged with advising the government on health and safety risks posed by human activities that alter the physical environment. The Agence Francaise de Sécurité Sanitaire Environnementale (AFSSE) is the third such advisory body created since the present government came to power in 1997.

The AFSSE will, like its food safety and medical safety counterparts, have the power to launch investigations, conduct scientific analysis, advise the government on risk management, and render its findings public. It will report directly to the Environment and Health ministries, but its field of action will be open to studying the environmental health and safety risks posed by all sectors, including agriculture, industry, and transport.

It is thought that the new agency will play a growing role in regulatory activity over sectors including chemical and biological products, electromagnetics, noise, and radioactivity.

Parliamentarians also approved the creation of an agency that will combine existing nuclear safety and radioactivity protection activities carried out by competing agencies into a single body.

The new Institut de Radioprotection et de Sureté Nucléaire (IRSN) will bring together the civilian nuclear safety activities carried out by the Institute of Protection and Nuclear Safety (IPSN) with related radioactivity monitoring carried out by the Office of Radiation Protection (OPRI).

Czech Republic

Problems with Waste Law

On 10 January 2001, the Constitutional Court struck down a request to invalidate a section of the current waste law regarding the assessment of collection fees. The Act allows municipalities to collect fees to pay for refuse collection either by imposing a "waste fee" on each resident of the municipality or by charging a fee based on the amount of waste an entity generates.

In May 2000, a group of senators filed a complaint with the Court, arguing that the waste law was unconstitutional because it allowed the imposition of fees regardless of whether a citizen or company produces waste. The Court decided that the municipal fees were constitutional.

A new act on waste which, unlike the current law, complies with European Union waste law, was submitted to Parliament in September 2000 and is still in committee. The European Integration Committee is also discussing it. The Environment Minister, Milos Kuzvart, expects this new Act to be approved by both houses of parliament and signed into law during 2001.

The Parliament is said to favour integrating the two approaches related to fees contained in the current law and placing the integrated formula into the waste bill currently in parliament. Under this proposal, a collection fee would be paid by most municipal entities. A second fee would be levied on the amount of waste produced. The Chairman of the parliamentary committee dealing with the bill, has said he favours integrating both fee models because everyone producing waste should pay at least a nominal fee for refuse collection. Imposing additional fees dependent on the amount of rubbish generated will reward those who recycle and minimise their waste stream.