

WorldWatch

by Staff

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Agriculture

The Asian Development Bank in Manila reports a possible agricultural crisis in Asia due to growing populations, environmental destruction and complacency among officials. Crop yields are in decline. Most of the world's poor live in Asia; more than 670 million rural Asians live in abject poverty.

China

Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji recently told Americans not to fear its trade deficit with China. He downsized the deficit to \$29 billion, which the U.S. estimates at \$57 billion. This is in spite of warnings issued from China and Russia that an arms race will ensue if America goes ahead with plans to develop a nationwide defense system against a limited missile attack.

Europe

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan recently exhorted Western Europe to assert its power with a single voice, saying responsibility for world affairs should not be left with the United States alone. Rather than accept the view that America is the world's only remaining superpower, Annan said Europeans should "ask themselves if they are satisfied with the world as it is. . . . If not they should do something to make their influence more effective."

Health

» The National Academy of Science in Washington reports the EPA standard for arsenic in drinking water is too high. Though uncertain how arsenic exposure triggers cancer, the panel concludes the current regulation does not sufficiently protect public health. A new arsenic standard will be proposed and likely made final in 2000.

» Moscow health inspectors confiscated and destroyed 1,450 pounds of cranberries from a market, saying they contained highly radioactive cesium. Though the fruit looked and tasted normal, it evidently contained dangerous fallout still lingering from the 1986 Chernobyl disaster.

Disease

Recent study indicates the HIV virus can hide for up to 60 years in the bodies of those being treated with powerful antiviral drugs. While the drugs can drive the body's supply of HIV down to undetectable levels, they cannot attack the virus, which lies quietly hidden in cells.

Israel

Intelligence Digest predicts that Ehud Barak's election as Israel's prime minister will force the peace process into its decisive, final stage and that the world will soon know whether the Western architects of the peace process were visionary geniuses or naïve dreamers. Any Barak concessions to the

Palestinians, they say, will be as liberal as any Israeli government is ever likely to offer. The Arab world, then, will soon know how far he will go and make their policy decisions based on that knowledge. *ID* also feels Barak may not be able to make as many concessions as some predict, due to political pressures in Israel—and in spite of extreme American pressure to make substantial concessions to the Palestinians.

Privacy

Tests are now being done in Toronto with technology that allows kidnapped children to be tracked by satellite and almost instantly located anywhere in North America. Of course, it could also be used to keep tabs on others.

Science and Medicine

Scientists make replacing broken brains sound easy: Just brew up a batch of gray matter, drill a hole in the skull, put in the new stuff and wire it like the original. *Voila!* New brains. Sounds crazy, but they are already doing it with mice. Since the 1980s, doctors have cautiously tested transferring brain cells from *aborted human fetuses* to Parkinson's disease patients. For some, it seems to work remarkably well, restoring lost control of movement.