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SCIENTISTS WARN OF RISE IN DISEASES SPREAD FROM ANIMALS TO HUMANS

January 4, 2010 The London Daily Telegraph reports: "Climate change and environmental disruption are spawning a host of new diseases being passed from animals to humans, scientists have warned. At least 45 such diseases have been reported to UN agencies over the past two decades and more are expected to be identified in coming years.



Experts at the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Washington claim that the world is braced for an increase in outbreaks due to global warming and changes in land use and farming practices. Dr Montira Pongsiri, an environmental health scientist at the EPA, told the Independent: 'We appear to be undergoing a distinct change in global disease ecology.

'The recent emergence of infectious diseases appears to be driven by globalisation and ecological disruption.'

He and eight colleagues examined five emerging and re-emerging diseases – malaria, lyme disease (spread by ticks), Hantavirus (spread by mice and rats), West Nile disease (spread by mosquitoes), and schistosomiasis (spread by freshwater snails). The researchers said that the number of people who succumbed to infectious diseases dropped in the developed world during the industrial revolution. However, the rise of manufacturing and pollution levels increased the incidence of chronic diseases including cancer, allergies and birth defects.

They believe we are now experiencing another transition driven by the destruction of plant and animal habitats, the loss of species and changes that have brought more humans into closer contact with animals than at any stage in human history.

HIV is the best known example of a disease passed from animals to humans which went on to cause the global Aids pandemic. The virus is thought to have crossed from chimpanzees to humans in West Africa in the last century and more than 25 million people worldwide have since died from it. The swine flu pandemic that emerged in Mexico last March also resulted from the mixing of viruses that infected pigs, birds and humans to create a new pandemic strain..."

EU STAFF TO HEAD TO GREECE AMID DEFICIT REPORTS

January 5, 2010 The EU Observer reported: "EU officials are preparing to make their way to Greece this week amid reports that the country's 2009 budget deficit may have topped already dire earlier forecasts.

With an expected touchdown in Athens this Wednesday (6 January), staff from the European Commission and the European Central Bank will be keen to hear how the eurozone country with the largest deficit plans to rectify the problem. The probing visit comes amid reports that the southeastern EU country has exceeded an already gloomy budget forecast for 2009.

According to Greek financial website Ta Nea, the country's deficit last year may have reached 14.5 percent of GDP, largely due to falling tax revenues. The deficit figure is even higher than the 12.7 percent revealed by the Greek Socialist government in November.

Athens is due to submit a budget report - known as a stability report - to the European Commission before the end of this month, as eurozone finance ministers prepare to discuss the issue at their regular monthly meeting on 15-16 February.

Under EU rules, member state deficits are not permitted to exceed three percent of GDP, although the vast majority are currently in breach of this threshold due to the financial crisis.

"There is close cooperation with the European Commission to avoid any danger of rejecting our stability programme, something which would be catastrophic," said Greek government spokesman George Petalotis.

The finance ministers' meeting comes just days after a planned informal reunion of EU heads of state, which the new permanent president of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, has announced will take place on 11 February."..."

YEMENIS COMPRISE HALF OF PRISONERS HELD AT GUANTANAMO BAY

January 6, 2010 The Voice of America reported: "President Barack Obama this week announced the suspension of future transfers of prisoners to Yemen from a U.S. detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The Nigerian man accused of trying to bomb a U.S. airliner December 25 reportedly was trained in Yemen.

U.S. officials say at least two of the prisoners once held here at Guantanamo Bay are now leading al-Qaida efforts in Yemen. About 90 detainees, nearly half of those remaining, are from Yemen.

But after the attempted Christmas Day bombing of a U.S. airliner, allegedly by a man trained in Yemen, the U.S. is reconsidering its release policy. President Obama says America will suspend future detainee transfers to Yemen."..."



ISRAEL SUCCESSFULLY TEST ANTI-ROCKET SYSTEM

January 6, 2010 SpaceWar.com reported: "Israel has completed tests on its Iron Dome anti-missile system, designed to provide a response to the thousands of rockets fired at Israel by Hamas and Hezbollah, the defence ministry said. The system, which can intercept short-range rockets and artillery shells, underwent its final tests in the past 48 hours, a statement said. "For the first time, Iron Dome faced multiple threats

simultaneously. All the threats were intercepted with complete success," the statement said. The next phase in the development of the system was to integrate it into the army, the statement said.

Israel hopes the system will provide it with a means to dealing with rocket fire from the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip and from Lebanon. Palestinian militants have fired thousands of home-made rockets into southern Israel, prompting Israel's devastating assault on the Islamist Hamas in Gaza on December 27, 2008.

The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah also fired some 4,000 rockets into northern Israel during a 2006 war with Israel, which now believes Hezbollah has an arsenal of some 40,000 rockets.

"Making Iron Dome operational will transform Israel's political and security situation on the northern and southern fronts," said Pinhas Buchris, the ministry's director general."

CHINA BUYS INTO CANADIAN TAR SANDS PROJECT

January 5, 2010 United Press International reported: "Canada and China have signed a deal that will see PetroChina, the market arm of the state-owned China National Petroleum Corp., investing \$1.7 billion in two Canadian tarsands deposits in Alberta.

Canadian Industry Minister Tony Clement said the government gave PetroChina the go-ahead for the acquisition. Industry sources said the deal was agreed about two months ago but only finalized before Clement's announcement before the new year.



Canada

If successfully exploited, the tar-sands development will secure for China's energy-hungry economy a substantial resource from about 5 billion barrels equivalent of "best case" bitumen.

Canada is the world leader in oil produced from tar sands, followed in a smaller measure by Venezuela. The Canadian tar-sands industry, centered in Alberta, produces more than 1 million barrels a day of synthetic oil -- about 40 percent of Canada's oil production -- from the sands currently under exploitation.



China

Oil sands involve a developing technology that normally requires high crude prices to remain attractive to investors. In China's case, however, government energy economists' projections for meeting future demand rather than market prices for oil is the decisive factor in the Chinese acquisition policy.

The deal gives PetroChina 60 percent control of Athabasca Oil Sands Corp.'s Mac Kay and Dover oil sands deposits in Alberta. The yield from the two deposits is likely to be modest when compared with total estimates of about 175 billion barrels of oil held in the sands, the largest after Saudi Arabia."..."

CHINA WARNS U.S. TO CANCEL TAIWAN ARMS

January 5, 2010 SpaceWar.com reported: "In the latest sign of deteriorating ties, China has warned the United States to halt an arms sale to Taiwan or face severe consequences. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Jiang Yu lodged the threat during a regular news briefing in response to questions on U.S.-China relations in 2010.

The warning comes amid plans by the U.S. government to sanction the sale of several billion dollars in Black Hawk helicopters and anti-missile batteries to Taiwan early this year. The deal is set to be followed by a plan to gauge the design and construction of diesel-powered submarines for the island., which China deems a wayward province.

U.S. President Barack Obama is also set to meet with the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibet, also considered a separatist state by China. Jang said China firmly opposes Washington's proposed arms sale saying it would "undermine U.S.-China relations."

She urged Washington to "clearly recognize the severe consequences of arms sales to Taiwan and adhere to the three Sino-U.S. joint communiques, especially the principles established in the Joint Communiqué on Aug. 17, 1982."

Washington is the top arms supplier of Taiwan, and under the Taiwan Relations Act the United States is required by law to provide Taiwan with defensive weapons."..."

IRANIAN STUDENTS: KHAMENEI'S FAMILY HAS FLED TO RUSSIA

January 7, 2009 Israel National News reported: "Pro-democracy activists in Iran reported Wednesday that family members of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have been secretly flown to Russia. The move was allegedly prompted by concerns over continuing anti-regime protests and resistance.

The Iranian Students Solidarity organization, representing tens of thousands of students in Tehran and other major cities, claims that contacts within the regime leaked the information to them.

According to these sources, members of Khamenei's family, including his daughter-in-law and grandson, have been evacuated to Russia in a private plane. In their secret trip, the Khamenei family members were accompanied by special security personnel assigned to maintain their safety."..."

The trip to Russia allegedly took place in the wake of violent clashes between regime forces and protesters on December 28."..."