

Press Review 07/2011 - Vietnam, Water and Environmental Technology,

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No	Title	Date	Source	Region	Catalogue	Description
1	Water Sources need to be protected	2/7/2011	IPS news	Africa	Water Resources	MBABANE , Jun 30, 2011 (IPS) - Seventy-five-year-old Verdiana Protas is worried that the 20 cattle she bought with her pension money will soon die because the 10-kilometre-long river in her village in northwest Tanzania has been dry for two years now and finding alternative sources of water is getting more and more difficult.
2	Canal clean-up talks founder	5/7/2011	VN news	HCM	Waste Water	With HCM City and neighboring Binh Duong Province unable to reach agreement on whether a canal that runs through the two localities remains polluted, plans to set up a treatment plant have stalled.
3	Nation's species face extinction	6/7/2011	VN news	HCM	Environment	Viet Nam's biodiversity conservation efforts continue to be woeful with the number of threatened species increasing and their threat status worsening.
4	Safe water programme devised for 2011-2015	7/7/2011	MONRE	Vietnam	Water Management	Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Sinh Hung has assigned the Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development and Planning and Investment to devise a national safe water and environment hygiene programme for the 2011-15 period.
5	Smog covers inner Ha Noi as experts debate the cause	7/7/2011	VN news	Hanoi	Environment	Smog has filled the air in central Ha Noi during the past three days, but experts cannot agree on its origin or cause.



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6	Pollution threatens City water supply	9/7/2011	VN news	HCM	Water Management	The pollution on Sai Gon River has become worse over the years as increasing industrialization along the river bank threatens the main water source of HCM City.
7	Mekong Delta ideal location for waterway traffic development	9/7/2011	VN news	Mekong	Water Management	The Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta in general and An Giang Province in particular have favorable conditions to develop waterway transport systems that will boost commerce and ease road traffic congestion in tandem
8	Farmers worry about mining in Red River Delta	9/7/2011	VN net bridge	Red River Delta	Mining	Despite serious public concerns on coal mining in the Red River Delta, Vietnam's largest mining company still wants to go ahead with mining huge coal reserves in the Red River Delta, one of the most populated agricultural areas in the country.
9	River water levels to be higher than 2010	9/7/2011	VN news	Vietnam	Water Resources	The highest water levels of the year in northern rivers were forecast to appear in late July and August, reported the National Hydro-meteorological Forecast Centre.
10	Vietnam set to impose green taxes on emissions, plastic bags	11/7/2011	MONRE	Vietnam	Environment	Vietnam will put environmental taxes on environmental pollutants or on goods whose use produces such pollutants, including gasoline, oil, grease, coal and plastic bags, starting on the first day of 2012.
11	VN OKs plan to upgrade Mekong Delta irrigation	12/7/2011	MONRE	Mekong Delta	Water Management	Vietnam's deputy Prime Minister Pham Gia Khiem has approved a US\$210 million project to upgrade the irrigation system in the Mekong Delta.



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12	Tap water remains a luxury at deluxe apartments	12/7/2011	MONRE	HCM	Water management	Receiving water from Sai Gon 2372 Barge is a routine thing for residents of 116 villas and 3 luxury apartment buildings of the Saigon Pearl Residential Complex at 92 Nguyen Huu Canh St.
13	Singapore, WB help HCM City improve environment	12/7/2011	MONRE	HCM	Environment	International Enterprises Singapore (IE Singapore) and the World Bank (WB) will help choose suitable public-private partnership (PPP) and private sector participation (PSP) models for the second stage of the Ho Chi Minh City Environmental Sanitation (Nhieu Loc-Thi Nghe basin) project.
14	Coal conveyor to reduce pollution	13/7/2011	VN news	Quang Ninh	Pollution	A conveyor tube transferring coal from Mao Khe Mine to Ben Can Port in northeastern Quang Ninh Province's Dong Trieu District is expected to put an end to air pollution caused by coal trucks in the region from August, if implemented on schedule.
15	Craft villages polluting environment	13/7/2011	MONRE	Thanh Hoa	Environment	It is estimated 80 per cent of traditional craft villages in northern Thanh Hoa Province do not have industrial waste treatment facilities. Furthermore, production in the province's 127 trade villages uses outdated technology and is inefficient, according to local officials.
16	ADB to help GMS boost Biomass use for clean energy and food needs	14/7/2011	VOV news	Mekong Sub-region	Environment	The Asian Development Bank (ADB) will help the Greater Mekong Sub region (GMS) scale up the use of biomass waste in the agricultural sector to meet its growing need for clean energy and food security for poor rural households.



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17	No proper solution to rescue Saigon River found	14/7/2011	VN net bridge	HCM	Pollution	The Saigon River has become more and more seriously polluted due to the increasingly high volume of untreated water discharged to the river every day. Meanwhile, both competent agencies and scientists are still fumbling for an effective solution to control the polluted river.
18	Trees felled for cassava	14/7/2011	VN news	Quang Ngai	Environment	Farmers in many central provinces have been destroying protective forests in order to grow cassava, the price of which has doubled, ever since the end of last year.
19	US\$12.2 million invested in Nam Dinh rural clean water and sanitation	14/7/2011	MONRE	Nam Dinh	Water Management	Work began on July 11 for a rural clean water supply and sanitation project for seven communes in Giao Thuy and Xuan Truong districts, Nam Dinh province with a total investment of VND 248 billion (US\$12.2 million).
20	ADB gives \$4m for biomass projects	15/7/2011	VN news	Vietnam	Waste	The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a regional technical assistance project to help Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos increase the use of biomass waste in agricultural sector.
21	Bank lends \$710m for three projects	15/7/2011	VN news	Vietnam	Water Management	The World Bank will lend US\$710 million for Viet Nam to implement three projects on public investment reform, irrigation and urban water supply.
22	US\$143 million to be invested in irrigational works	15/7/2011	VN news	Dak Nong	Water Management	Authorities in the Central Highlands province of Dak Nong have decided to invest VND3 trillion (US\$143 million) on irrigation works in the province's ethnic region over the next ten years.



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23	Recycling waste matter into bricks, concrete	15/7/2011	MONRE	Vietnam	Waste	The concept of converting waste matter into bricks and concrete for construction was developed by Dr. Nguyen Ngoc Chau, Head of Science Research and Environment Transfer Center in 2003 and by 2006 he and his started work on the project.
24	Sanitation: an opportunity for collaboration	15/7/2011	VN news	HCM	Environment	The second phase of the HCM City Nhieu Loc-Thi Nghe Environmental Sanitation Project could benefit from a public private partnership (PPP) arrangement under an agreement signed this week.
25	Vietnam is wasting rubbish	15/7/2011	VN net bridge	Vietnam	Waste	While developed countries invest millions of USD in waste recycling for savings and environmental protection, Vietnam – a poor country – is among the top nations which are wasting this “new” resource.
26	Master plan for Hanoi to be submitted to PM	17/7/2011	Vfej	Hanoi	Others	Hanoi Master Plan to 2030 with vision to 2050 is expected to be sent to Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung for consideration by August 1.
27	Aluminum may contain toxins	18/7/2011	VN news	HCM	Pollution	For many years, recycled aluminium has been widely used to make cheap kitchen saucepans, pots, woks and frypans, but medical experts warn that the metal is a threat to human health as it is not processed properly.
28	Forest fires in central region destroy 100ha	18/7/2011	VN news	Phu Yen	Environment	A fire destroyed at least 100 hectares of keo (acacia auriculiformis) forests in the central Phu Yen Province Saturday, making it the most severe fire in recent years, local authorities said.



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29	Hoi An tries to clean up its act	18/7/2011	VN news	Hoi An	Environment	Hoi An, a World Heritage Site, opened its first solid waste treatment plant yesterday.
30	Factory sludge pollutes water	19/7/2011	VN news	Hanoi	Pollution	An alcohol production company shut down four years ago floods neighbouring homes with black smelly water every time it rains.
31	Geo-parks provide jobs for locals	19/7/2011	VN news	Ha Giang	Geology	Local communities have an important role to play in the management and development of Geo-parks, said experts at the second Asia-Pacific Geo-parks Network Symposium held in Ha Noi yesterday.
32	Tri An Hydroelectric Power Station sets up the water moderating plan	19/7/2011	MONRE	South of VN	Hydro Power Plant	This year's rainy season is forecast to be unfavorable and difficult to predict the effects. Therefore, in respect of water drainage as well as drought fight and saltwater resistance for the period of 2011 – 2012, Tri An Hydroelectric Power Station has proposed a detailed plan to sustain its safe operation.
33	City port faces development hurdles	21/7/2011	SGGP	HCM	Port	Nguyen Xuan Thanh, from the HCM City University of Economics, spoke to Sai Gon Giai Phong (Liberated Sai Gon) about ways to develop ports in HCM City.
34	Dong Nai grows greener - and greener	21/7/2011	VN news	Dong Nai	Environment	Authorities in the southern province of Dong Nai have set long-term targets for building a green sustainable economy, with strategies that protect and expand the forest cover.



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35	Petrol leak pollutes commune water	21/7/2011	VN news	Bac Giang	Pollution	Hundreds of residents in northern Bac Giang Province's Duc Thang Commune have been forced to use contaminated water for their daily activities because of a leaking underground tank from a nearby enterprise.
36	Climate change needs long-term plan	23/7/2011	VN news	HCM	Climate Change	Viet Nam's climate change adaptation strategies need a long-term focus and should be integrated into mainstream policies targeting sustainable rural development and poverty reduction, experts said at a seminar in HCM City yesterday.
37	Firms to collect non-degradable waste	23/7/2011	VN news	Hanoi	Waste	The General Department of Environment (GDE) is about to issue a draft decision regulating the responsibility of production and trading companies in reclaiming non-degradable waste such as batteries.
38	Japan offers \$129m for water	26/7/2011	VN news	Vietnam	Water Resources	The Japanese Government has decided to provide between 10 and 15 billion JPY (\$128.9 million - \$193.3 million) for a water project in Viet Nam.
39	APEC tackles flooding due to climate change	30/7/2011	VN news	Vietnam	Environment	Members of the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) should join together to reduce the increasing threats of abnormal floods from climate change, a workshop was told yesterday in the central coastal city of Da Nang.
40	City changes tune on solid waste imports	30/7/2011	VN news	HCM	Waste Management	The HCM City People's Committee has revoked its approval of a plan to import 10,000 tonnes of solid waste meant for testing waste management facilities belonging to a private firm.



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Water Sources need to be protected

MBABANE , Jun 30, 2011 (IPS) - Seventy-five-year-old Verdiana Protas is worried that the 20 cattle she bought with her pension money will soon die because the 10-kilometre-long river in her village in northwest Tanzania has been dry for two years now and finding alternative sources of water is getting more and more difficult.

Like the other 200 families in Kagondo neighborhood in Bukoba urban district where Protas has lived for 40 years, her animals used drink from the river, which was also a source of water for domestic use.

Now Protas and the other residents don't have a reliable source of water and they are forced to walk long distances to find water for drinking and their livestock, she says. "Some people walk for 10 kilometres but only end up getting unclean water," says Protas.

Other natural springs in the area are on the verge of disappearing because of the lack of rain and residents are worried about their future. While no scientific research has been done to prove the lack of rainfall in Bukoba urban district is because of climate change, residents are concerned that not enough is being done to preserve their water sources.

Southern African Development Community (SADC) officials attending the Fifth Water Dialogue on strategies to reduce the impact of climate change on water resources are hesitant to say that water sources like rivers and springs are at risk of becoming extinct due to climate change. However, they agree that increasing temperature levels might lead to water sources disappearing.

Climate change expert Leonard Unganai, from the Coping with Drought and Climate Change project in Zimbabwe, says some parts of Africa have experienced warning trends as more water is evaporating due to increased temperatures.

"The challenge with climate science is that we can't predict what would happen in future but we plan with the most likely scenario. Temperatures are rising and this will lead to shortage of rainfall. If we don't manage water sources properly there could be water problems," says Unganai.

Protas is worried that her maize farm could also fail due to inconsistent rains, which have resulted to low yields.

"We planted maize early this year but it didn't rain until the harvesting season was about to start," Protas says.

Her region is traditionally a banana-growing region but banana plantations started drying up a few years back because they relied heavily on rainfall. The lack of rain forced most of the families in the area to start growing maize as a staple food, which requires less water.

Ungani says across the continent farmers like Protas who only depend on maize as a crop are suffering because of the change of rainfall, compared to those who grow other crops like cassava and sweet potatoes, which require less rain.

In Tanzania, the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty aims to increase access to clean and safe water in rural areas from 53 percent in 2003 up to 65 percent in 2010.

However, independent reports indicate fewer resources are being allocated to meet such targets.

A water and sanitation equity report for 2009, produced by the Tanzania Water and Sanitation Network, says that climate change is affecting water sources in rural Tanzania.

The report cites the 2005/06 water sector development budget, which sets aside funds for developing sources of water, as having allocated over 80 percent of the budget to urban areas and less than 20 percent to rural areas.

Tanzania ministry of water official, Sylvester Matemu says climate change has not only affected local communities but the drought currently experienced in some parts of Tanzania has also led to food shortages.

However, Matemu says the country has created the National Adaptation Programme of Action that seeks to identify priority activities to respond to the impact of climate change.

"We have outlined how to protect our water sources and created a network to monitor the progress. We are also engaging the private sector in the process," says Matemu.

For Protas and the other families in northwest Tanzania, their future remains uncertain. Protas says their only hope is when government decides to act.

Canal clean-up talks founder

With HCM City and neighboring Binh Duong Province unable to reach agreement on whether a canal that runs through the two localities remains polluted, plans to set up a treatment plant have stalled.

Ba Bo Canal, which runs through the city's Thu Duc District and the districts of Di An and Thuan An in Binh Duong, is contaminated by large quantities of wastewater discharged by industrial parks and nearly 10,000 households.

Last year HCM City had agreed to build the treatment plant but said Binh Duong had to ensure the effluents were cleansed of toxins before being discharged into the canal.

It is over this that the two are now deadlocked: HCM City says the water is still contaminated but the province says that with all the measures it has taken, the quality of the industrial wastewater has improved and it does not know why the city denies this.

The city wants Binh Duong to be more resolute in dealing with the industrial parks that contaminate the canal.

If it does not clean up its act, the VND744 billion (US\$36 million) treatment plant would end up as a waste, it says.

Huynh Thanh Nha, deputy head of the HCM City Environmental Protection Department, said periodic tests of the canal water this year found that the pollutants, which exceed permitted levels many times, included COD (chemical oxygen demand), BOD (biochemical oxygen demand), TSS (total suspended solids), phosphorus, nickel, and the coliform bacillus.

At Song Than I, the coliform level is 1,189 times higher than permitted level, and at Song Than II, 32,000 times. At the Binh Chieu residential area, the ammonia content exceeds the permitted level by 14 times, and hydrogen sulphide by 38.

Nguyen Trung Viet, head of the department's Office of Solid Waste Management, said long-term exposure to high concentrations of NH₃ and H₂S would cause paralysis of the nervous system and death.

Nation's species face extinction

Viet Nam's biodiversity conservation efforts continue to be woeful with the number of threatened species increasing and their threat status worsening, according to the latest National Environment Report (2010).

The 2007 national Red Data Book categorises 418 species of animals and 464 species of plants as threatened, said the report released by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment on June 10.

A large number of species previously listed as vulnerable are now endangered or critically endangered, the report said.

According to the 1992-96 Red Data Book, the most severe threat status for species in Viet Nam is "endangered", but the most severe status now is "extinct", the report said.

Over the last decade or so, at least ten species – one flora and nine fauna – have vanished in Viet Nam, including bo xam or kouprey (*Bos sauveli*), te Giac Hai Sung or Sumatran rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) and heo voi or Asian tapir (*Tapirus indicus*), it said.

The number of globally threatened species of animals that were classified as endangered in the IUCN Red List increased to 47 species in 2010 from 46 in 2004 and 25 in 1996, the report said.

A number of species, that were considered either extinct in the wild or extinct in Viet Nam, have been found in neighbouring countries.

Natural habitat loss, overexploitation, invasive alien species, pollution, forest fires and climate change were major threats to threatened species, the report said.

Poor State management of biodiversity was also a major pressure on threatened species, it added.

The large number of globally threatened species in Viet Nam put it in the top 15 countries with declining mammal species, top 20 for birds and top 30 for plants and amphibians, the report said.

Safe water programme devised for 2011-2015

Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Sinh Hung has assigned the Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development and Planning and Investment to devise a national safe water and environment hygiene programme for the 2011-15 period.

The 2006-2010 national safe water and environment hygiene programme has basically achieved set targets with more than 52 million people getting access to safe water by the end of 2010, 13.2 million people more than the figure of late 2005.

In addition, almost 32,000 schools and kindergartens have access to safe water and sanitation systems representing an annual rise of 2 percent to 84 percent by 2010.

Safe water and sanitation systems are now available at all schools and medical clinics in the Mekong delta provinces of An Giang, Vinh Long, and Long An and southernmost Ca Mau province.

Smog covers inner Ha Noi as experts debate the cause

Smog has filled the air in central Ha Noi during the past three days, but experts cannot agree on its origin or cause.

Le Thanh Dung, who lives with her family on Kim Ma Street in Ba Dinh District, said that even after she closed all the windows and doors on Tuesday night, "we still felt our eyes smart, and our small daughter kept coughing".

Pham Thu Trang, a resident of Thanh Xuan District, said she also encountered smog with a burnt smell when she went out on Tuesday night.

Trang added that on Monday she went to her hometown in Thanh Tri District and saw local farmers burning dozens of piles of straw along the sides of the roads.

"The smoke from the burnt straw was so dark that I had to turn on my motorbike's headlight even though it was eight o'clock in the morning," she said. Trang guessed that the smoke from their fires traveled over to central Ha Noi.

Pham Van Khanh, deputy director of the Ha Noi Department of Natural Resources and Environment, agreed that the smog was indeed caused by burnt straw in certain suburbs of the city.

This phenomenon has occurred several times in the past 10 years, especially in hot weather, he said, and not only in Viet Nam but also in Japan and Australia. "The heat prevents smoke from drifting upwards and instead it moves laterally, staying low to the ground," he said.

But some other experts believe the smog is a product of environmental pollution, caused by photochemical in the atmosphere.

Chairman of the Thanh Tri District People's Committee Nguyen Quang Hieu said that most of the farmers in his district used straw to make fertilizer and did not burn it.

If the smog were caused by burnt straw, he said, it would cover tree leaves and household appliances with soot.

Ha Noi's many tall buildings prevent air circulation, but harmful exhaust fumes from vehicles and industrial zones were behind the photochemical smog.

Nguyen Huu Hai of the National Centre for Hydro-Meteorological Forecasting agreed with Hieu's reasoning.

Hot air enters the country from the west at the height of 3,000 meters and pollutants collect underneath, said Hai.

This harmful smog could cause optical and cardiovascular diseases, he said.

"Families can turn on fans or air-conditioners to blow away the smog, but in the long term we should treat exhaust fumes to improve the air quality," said Hai.

Pollution threatens City water supply

The pollution on Sai Gon River has become worse over the years as increasing industrialization along the river bank threatens the main water source of HCM City.

The river flows through 40 industrial parks in Binh Duong, Binh Phuoc and Tay Ninh provinces and HCM City. Only 21 of them have an industrial waste treatment system.

Most of the treated water released from facilities does not meet the quality required by environmental authorities.

The Sai Gon River also is polluted by industrial and agricultural waste water from small-sized enterprises operating along the river, amounting to 65,000 cubic meters a day. In addition, every day the river receives over 748,000 cubic meters of waste water, discharged from residential areas in localities, with more than 90 per cent of the waste water coming from HCM City.

Lam Minh Triet, head of the Institute for Water and Environmental Technology, said that a regular test on the river's water had shown that its pollution had exceeded Vietnamese standards many times, especially water taken from the HCM City section.

Only one waste water treatment plant has been built along the river valley, the Binh Hung Waste Water Treatment Factory in Binh Chanh District. It is designed to treat 141,000 cubic meters of waste water daily. An expert said that with the limited number of waste water treatment plants, less than 20 per cent of household waste water was collected and treated, with the rest discharged directly into the river.

The river pollution is also at a serious level in neighboring Binh Duong Province, where many production businesses are located.

Tran Thanh Quang, deputy head of the province's Environment Protection Bureau, said last year his agency fined 555 enterprises a total of VND12.6 billion (US\$583,000) for violating environmental regulations.

The province has more than 5,000 enterprises; fewer than 20 per cent of them satisfy environmental standards. Test results in the province show that pollution has increased.

In order to deal with the river's pollution," Triet proposed the establishment of an agency that would manage the Sai Gon River.

Personnel from related provinces as well as HCM City People's Committee and representatives from Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment would be involved in the agency's work.

The agency would be responsible for conducting water tests and inspections.

He also suggested that 13 major projects worth VND1.7 trillion (\$82million) be deployed between 2011 and 2015 to improve polluted water in the river. These projects would treat water at industrial parks or dredge canals.

Triet and other scientists warned that if pollution continued unchecked, the river could become a dead river. He said the city should take serious steps to prevent river pollution.



Pollution of the Sai Gon River has become worse over the years due to industrial waste water discharge.

Mekong Delta ideal location for waterway traffic development

The Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta in general and An Giang Province in particular have favorable conditions to develop waterway transport systems that will boost commerce and ease road traffic congestion in tandem.

The statement was made by experts at a seminar on "Management of Transport Infrastructure Development in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta" held in Can Tho City.

A coastline that is more than 700km long as well as numerous canals and rivers that crisscross each other make the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta an ideal location to develop an efficient waterway transport system, according to experts. Doan Canh Hoan, an expert from the Ministry of Transport, said that An Giang Province was one of the Delta provinces that can develop roadway and waterway networks while promoting agriculture and aquaculture.

The province has more than 2,400km of waterways including rivers and canals that do not only form a huge aqua cultural resource, but also brings in large amounts of silt annually from upstream areas, providing fertile soil for agricultural development.

He said the province's roadway network covers 3,424km with 1,200 bridges that span its rivers and canals.

The main hurdle facing the delta in developing its road and waterway transport systems was the lack of investment that must be raised at home and abroad, speakers agreed at the seminar.

Relevant agencies have estimated that a fund of VND100 trillion (nearly US\$5 billion) would be needed by 2015 (with a vision to 2020) to develop the transport system in the delta's 13 provinces.

The delta comprises the provinces of An Giang, Long An, Tien Giang, Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, Dong Thap, Can Tho, Vinh Long, Tra Vinh, Soc Trang, Ben Tre, Kien Giang, and Hau Giang.

Hoan said that the delta plans, over the next decade, to continue developing high-standard inland waterway routes, invest in seaports to enable large vessels to enter the region, upgrade the Ca Mau Airport and put the Phu Quoc Airport into service.

Pham Dinh Cuong, director of the Public Asset Management under the Ministry of Finance, said the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta aimed to meet the demand for passenger and cargo transport by 2020, offering good quality at affordable prices. By 2030, the region would be able to satisfy international standard transport needs and services, he added.

In fact, by 2030, a smooth and safe transport system with high connectivity would have been developed in the delta, he said.

Other transportation targets for the region included the completion of five main overland routes – the National Highway 1A, N1 and N2, a coastal route, and the HCM City-Can Tho Expressway, he said.

The region would also strive, by then, to finish the construction of big bridges like Vam Cong, Cao Lanh, Co Chien and Nam Can, and have roads linking all its communes.

Sangkeon Lee of the South Korea Institute of Infrastructure Development Studies said that in his country, auto numbers had quadrupled from four million 20 years ago, but it had kept itself abreast of international trends and applied advanced technologies in developing its transport infrastructure.

In the future, South Korea planned to build highways that can monitor vehicles' speeds and the number of passengers, he said, adding it could also help Viet Nam develop its transportation system.

The half-day seminar was co-organized by Department of Public Asset Management, the MDTF2 (Multi-donor Trust Fund) project, and the South Korea Institute of Infrastructure Development Studies.

Earlier, on Wednesday, the Project Management Unit of Southern Inland Waterways (PMU S.I. Waterways) inked three contracts with successful bidders for the World Bank-backed Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta Transport Infrastructure Development Project.

A World Bank loan and a grant from the Australian government through its development aid organisation, AusAID, fund the US\$312 million project, also called WB5.

The project aims to improve traffic system in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta region, minimize traffic jams on main roads and waterways, reduce transportation costs between production areas and consumer markets, and support hunger eradication and poverty reduction efforts in the region.

It will dredge canals, strengthen canal banks, and build frontage roads and bridges.

The three winning contractors are: Uniconsult Consulting (Germany); Halla Engineering-&Construction Corporation (Korea); and a Joint Venture between Khanh Giang (Viet Nam) &Dredging International Asia Pacific (Singapore).

Nguyen Ngoc Thach, general director of PMU S.I. Waterways, which will oversee the project, said during the signing ceremony that the potential for waterway transport development in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta was very high.

He also noted that transportation costs in Viet Nam, which has been higher than in other countries, were hurting the competitiveness of local goods.

Farmers worry about mining in Red River Delta

Despite serious public concerns on coal mining in the Red River Delta, Vietnam's largest mining company still wants to go ahead with mining huge coal reserves in the Red River Delta, one of the most populated agricultural areas in the country.

The Vietnam National Coal and Minerals Corporation is impatient in implementing the mining project because geologists estimate coal reserves in the Red River Delta are about 210 billion tons, spread out in the northern provinces of Thai Binh, Hung Yen and Nam Dinh.

The problem lies in the fact that the Red River Delta is the country's second largest rice basket and rich paddy fields will be destroyed and many farmers rendered jobless once the mining starts.

Does Vietnam want coal or rice?

The coal mining company said it had applied for permission to launch a pilot mining project on three sites, Khai Chau in Hung Yen province, Kien Xuong and Tien Hai in Thai Binh province. The Prime Minister is expected to review the project during the third quarter of this year.

According to Ngo Xuan Chien, deputy chairman of the district People's Committee, although the mining company has not yet implemented the project, residents in district Tien Hai are very worried about compensation, when authorities will reclaim their farmland for the project and farmers in Hung Yen fret that they will be rendered idle when their paddy fields are reclaimed.

However, agencies in the province have a different viewpoint. Pham Van Nam, head of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Thai Binh province is concerned that most residents here only know farming skills and are unskilled to take up any other jobs. Subsequently, any change will lead to widespread depression.

On the contrary, the Department of Industry and Trade is waiting to implement the project. Nguyen Hanh Phuc, chairman of People's Committee of Thai Binh province hopes the project will help develop the province, stating that the province GDP is approximately VND1 trillion but it spends VND2.5 trillion. Moreover, 1.1 million tons of rice is produced here and around 500,000 tons is consumed.

Prof. Nguyen Khac Vinh, chairman of the Vietnam Geology Federation, said the company must consider the mining methodologies so that exploitation does not take over farmlands. The company has promised that the project will not disrupt farming activities as it will use a technology that gasifies the coal underground and minimizes environmental impact, unlike open-cast mines in the northern province of Quang Ninh.

Dr. Nguyen Tri Ngoc, chief of the Department of Crop Production (DCP) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is cautious about mining projects as there is high risk of land subsiding which will affect thousands of residents in the delta.

Prof. Tran Van Tri from the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology said that people needed to study the geography of the region much more carefully to avoid environmental pollution and cause food security problems. Since mining is all conducted underground, it will certainly have an impact on the underground water reserves and the rising gas will make the fields dry.

Although energy security is essential and vital for the country's growth, the government should also lay as much emphasis on food security.

River water levels to be higher than 2010

The highest water levels of the year in northern rivers were forecast to appear in late July and August, reported the National Hydro-meteorological Forecast Centre.

Levels were expected to be higher than last year, said the deputy director of the centre, Le Thanh Hai.

In the southern region, levels in Tien and Hau rivers were also expected to surpass last year's, and early flooding was likely to occur on Mekong River this month, Hai said.

The centre warned that wide scale flooding would appear in both rivers and streams in the central highland region.

According to Hai, water levels have risen due to increased rain brought on by this year's La Nina, characterized by unusually cold ocean temperatures, opposed to El Nino which is known for warming up the seas.

Areas at risk have been advised to prepare for strong storms, flooding, flash floods and landslides, especially in mountainous areas in northern, central and central highland regions.

Central and southern provinces have also been warned to be ready for an increased number of strong storms, due to climate change.

In the past, those storms only hit the southern region once every ten years, but more recently, they had appeared more regularly in 1997, 2000 and 2006, he said.

The centre had difficulties forecasting storms due to uncompleted observational data and abnormal weather conditions this year, Hai said.

"However, we would make every effort to give early and prompt warnings to the public," he said.

New regulations have been set in place to provide earlier warnings regarding tropical storms and floods.

The centre has operated a weather forecast system based on a time period of less than six hours before storms or floods hit Ha Noi, he said, adding that forecasts for sea-based natural disasters were more detailed.

Abnormal weather conditions and storms, such as the tornado that swept through northern Hai Phong Province's Thuy Nguyen District on June 23, killing two people while damaging nearly 900 houses, have been blamed on climate change, he said. "We have never seen snowfall in March nor witnessed flash floods this early in the rainy season," Hai said.

Heavy rain, whirlwinds damage 211 houses

YEN BAI – Two schools and three houses collapsed while 197 other buildings were damaged early yesterday morning following prolonged rain and whirlwinds sweeping through the districts of Van Yen and Van Chan in northern Yen Bai Province.

The whirlwind also damaged 7,200sq.m of rice at an estimated loss of VND600 million (US\$29,200).

Authorities have assisted local residents in dealing with the aftermath of the storm, donating around VND5 million to individual residents in some cases. — VNS

Vietnam set to impose green taxes on emissions, plastic bags

Vietnam will put environmental taxes on environmental pollutants or on goods whose use produces such pollutants, including gasoline, oil, grease, coal and plastic bags, starting on the first day of 2012, a highly experienced tax specialist said Wednesday.

Ms. Nguyen Thi Cuc, Chairwoman of the Vietnam Tax Consultants' Association, former deputy head of the General Tax Administration, was speaking at a workshop in Ho Chi Minh City, held to make the country's Environmental Tax Law known more.

Her association co-organized the seminar with the Britain-based Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA).

She listed the eight taxable subjects as 1) gasoline, oil, grease; 2) coal; 3) Hydrogen-chlorofluorocarbon liquid (HCFC); 4) taxable plastic bags; 5) herbicides that are restricted from use; 6) pesticides that are restricted from use; 7) forest product preservatives that are restricted from use; and 8) warehouse disinfectants that are restricted from use.

Among them, the rate on plastic bags is the highest, VND30,000 – VND50,000 per kilogram, she said. The former deputy head of the General Tax Administration added plastic bag is a serious pollutant.

She said the green taxes would be imposed on some activities and things like solid waste and mineral mining.

Ms. Cuc is among those who drafted the law.

Regarding law making and enforcement, she said the Vietnamese legislative body and government are of the view that the implementation, monitoring and analysis procedures are as thorough as possible, to improve the transparency and effectiveness of such taxes and to be the practical guideline towards sustainable development.

However, a decree on how to accomplish the law is not available yet, Ms. Cuc said, adding that the government is working on it.

Joining her as another key speaker at the workshop was Mr. Chas Roy-Chowdhury, Head of Taxation Department, and Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA). He shared lessons learnt from the UK and European Union. "Green taxes need to be transparent, unambiguous and consistent in order to achieve the environmental protection goals. The taxes also need to make the public and business community understand that the taxes are going to raise not only the governmental income but also the social awareness of environment protection," he said.

He said if environment taxation lacks international co-ordination, it will not impact global pollution levels, as companies will simply relocate and move the pollution problem with them, he added.

The tax specialist said once Vietnam starts the green tax law, it would to some extent affect foreign direct investment inflows into the country, but a must is transparency, and Vietnam should pursue its sustainable development policies.

According to him, Vietnam should raise the awareness of this taxation. Public trust in the green tax system is vital. The Government and policy makers need to create a balance between companies' desire to maximize profit and the environmental protection goals.

More than 200 people including CEOs and CFOs took part in the workshop. The participants raised lots of tax-related questions to the two speakers. The workshop is repeated in Hanoi on July 7, 2011, also with the two speakers.

VN OKs plan to upgrade Mekong Delta irrigation

Vietnam's deputy Prime Minister Pham Gia Khiem has approved a US\$210 million project to upgrade the irrigation system in the Mekong Delta.

\$160 million of the total expense will come from official development assistance from the World Bank.

The project, which is aimed to protect and strengthen the Mekong Delta's water resources, includes cultivating 120,000 hectares of aquaculture, upgrading irrigation and roads, providing access to clean water to 80,000 households, and reducing soil salinity.

Tap water remains a luxury at deluxe apartments

Receiving water from Sai Gon 2372 Barge is a routine thing for residents of 116 villas and 3 luxury apartment buildings of the Saigon Pearl Residential Complex at 92 Nguyen Huu Canh St.

Due to the weak flow of HCMC's tap water, these residents have to receive 800 to 1,200 cubic meter of water from this barge every day.

According to Saigon Water Corporation (Sawaco) which provides water for HCMC, fast urbanization on Nguyen Huu Canh Street has put great pressure on the city's tap water system, forcing it to use barges temporarily before it is able to build a new 400mm water pipe for this street.

This pipe plan, however, was long delayed as the company was yet to obtain a road digging license and had to wait until the Urban Traffic Management Zone No. 1 (under the city's Department of Transport) completed its repair work on Nguyen Huu Canh Street.

Not until last month did Sawaco, the Department of Transport and the Urban Traffic Management Zone No. 1 finally come with a solution: install the pipeline before repairing the street.

In the meantime, residents in these luxurious apartments will continue to receive water from barges.

Singapore, WB help HCM City improve environment



International Enterprises Singapore (IE Singapore) and the World Bank (WB) will help choose suitable public-private partnership (PPP) and private sector participation (PSP) models for the second stage of the Ho Chi Minh City Environmental Sanitation (Nhieu Loc-Thi Nghe basin) project.

A memorandum of understanding to this effect was signed between IE Singapore, the WB and the municipal People's Committee in Ho Chi Minh City on July 11.

Nguyen Phuoc Thao, Director of the municipal Flood Prevention Centre said that the city is conducting research into a feasible PPP/PSP model for the project's second stage, including the construction of a drainage system and a wastewater processing plant with a daily capacity of 830,000 cubic meters.

Started in March this year, the project has so far received US\$290 million from the WB. The project's first stage, which has an initial positive impact on over two million city people, will be finished by the end of this year.

Tan Soon Kim, Director of the Southeast Asia Group of IE Singapore said this is the first time his organisation has provided technical assistance to Vietnam, which would make a foundation for deeper cooperation between Vietnam and Singapore.

Alain Barbu, Operations and Portfolio Manager of WB said the WB has so far pledged over US\$600 million to the city and planned to provide another US\$200 million for the sanitation project's second stage.

Coal conveyor to reduce pollution

A conveyor tube transferring coal from Mao Khe Mine to Ben Can Port in northeastern Quang Ninh Province's Dong Trieu District is expected to put an end to air pollution caused by coal trucks in the region from August, if implemented on schedule.

Pham Thanh Truong, chairman of the Mao Khe Town People's Committee, said that the tube was one part of key solutions to improving the town environment.

The 3.6-km tube, 3.5 meters in diameter, will be capable of dealing with 2-3 million tones of coal per year. Tube construction, started in 2008, has cost over VND520 billion (\$25.4 million) and included a communication system and a camera monitoring network.



Coal trucks drop countless amounts of coal in their wake on route from Mao Khe Mine to Ben Can Port. Local residents have suffered from coal dust and muddy roads due to the heavily loaded trucks

A local resident, Nguyen Van Quang, said that, for years, locals had to contend with speeding coal trucks dropping countless amounts of coal in their wakes on route from Mao Khe Mine to Ben Can Port.

Quang said that residents along the road had to keep their doors and windows closed at all times in order to avoid suffocating in coal dust, which turned sunny days gloomy and roads into mud when it rained.

Other residents complained that the heavy loaded trucks had caused potholes along the road, jeopardising safety.

The vice head of the district Natural Resources and Environment Department, Vuong Van Thong, said that air pollution, caused by coal trucks, had been reported in the town for years.

Around 10 years ago, the Mao Khe Coal Company, a member of the Viet Nam National Coal and Mineral Industries Group, upgraded the road for trucks to transport coal.

Although the road was sprayed with water to avoid dust on a daily basis, high traffic frequency undermined most such efforts, Thong said.

Local households got so angry with the situation that they had gathered to stop trucks from using the road last month, marking the fifth time that local residents have taken it upon themselves to urge the Mao Khe Coal Company to solve the problem, according to Truong.

In response to complaints, and having previously tried to fix the road without much effect, the company decided to work with local authorities and affected households in order to find a solution.

Truong said that, as part of renewed efforts, the company had collected all waste on route, fixed potholes and upgraded the road with macadam.

"As soon as the conveyor tube goes into operation, the town plans to invest VND40 billion (\$1.9 million) in upgrading the road surface, pavement and lighting system along the old route," Truong affirmed.

Craft villages polluting environment

It is estimated 80 per cent of traditional craft villages in northern Thanh Hoa Province do not have industrial waste treatment facilities. Furthermore, production in the province's 127 trade villages uses outdated technology and is inefficient, according to local officials.

The province has an environmental protection budget of just VND15 million (US\$724) per commune.

In addition, there is no overall plan for the development of craft villages in the province or detailed regulations on environmental protection.

The Thanh Hoa Province authority has set itself the goal of building waste treatment facilities in every craft village, capable of treating more than 60 per cent of hazardous waste, by 2020.

The provincial authority also plans to invest in waste collection.

In addition, local firms will be encouraged to improve their production methods and apply new technologies.

Provincial officials added that the authority would issue environmental protection guidelines.

ADB to help GMS boost Biomass use for clean energy and food needs

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) will help the Greater Mekong Sub region (GMS) scale up the use of biomass waste in the agricultural sector to meet its growing need for clean energy and food security for poor rural households.

The ADB Board of Directors has approved a regional technical assistance project that will be funded by a USD4 million grant from the Nordic Development Fund along with counterpart financing of USD600,000 from the governments of Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Vietnam.

The ADB will administer the grant and carry out the project in the three countries. Biomass waste such as rice husks and animal manure is abundant in GMS countries but is not efficiently used as a source of clean energy or as fertilizer.

At the same time, the growing practice of planting large-scale crop for bio-fuel poses a threat to food security by reducing food production and forest land.

Sununtar Setboonsarng, Principal Natural Resources and Agriculture Economist, in ADB's Southeast Asia Department said promoting the more efficient use of biomass can simultaneously address the goals of fighting climate change and improving the well-being of the rural poor, which are often seen as competing priorities.

The project will fund pilot investment projects to scale up biomass technologies such as household biogas systems, bio-char kilns, and improved cooking stoves.

The project will also conduct studies, build human and institutional capacity on biomass investment, and promote regional exchange among the GMS countries. "This project will also help strengthen regional cooperation as it will synchronize GMS bio-energy and biomass standards and regulations to bring them in line with global standards," said Ms. Setboonsarng.

The project is due to begin in July 2011 and will be completed by December 2014. The Nordic Development Fund is the joint multilateral development institution of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, that provides grants for climate change intervention in developing countries.

The project is part of the ADB's Energy for All Initiative, which increases access to clean, modern energy for inclusive growth and sustainable human development.

The ADB is dedicated to reducing poverty in Asia-Pacific region through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration. Established in 1966, it is owned by 67 members, 48 of which belong to the region.

No proper solution to rescue Saigon River found

The Saigon River has become more and more seriously polluted due to the increasingly high volume of untreated water discharged to the river every day. Meanwhile, both competent agencies and scientists are still fumbling for an effective solution to control the polluted river.

Pollution increases rapidly, solutions come late

HCM City every day discharges more than one million cubic meters of domestic waste water to Saigon River, while Binh Duong province discharges 41,500 cubic meters of urban waste water and nearly 40,000 cubic meters of industrial waste water.

Meanwhile, according to Le Viet Thang, MA, from the Water and Environment Technology Institute, less than 20 percent of the waste water is treated before flowing to the valleys of the Saigon River.

Tran Van Quang, Deputy Head of the Binh Duong provincial Environment Protection Sub-department, admitted that it is very difficult to control the waste water of industrial workshops in the province, and that many enterprises keep discharging untreated waste water to the environment. "There are over 5000 industrial production enterprises, while only 20 percent of waste water is treated in accordance with the required standards," Quang said.

The Binh Duong provincial authorities have installed an automatic waste water monitoring mechanism at six industrial zones in the province, which clearly shows that treated waste water still cannot meet the required standards. Quang said that the provincial authorities plan to install cameras as well to observe the waste water discharge.

Phung Chi Sy, Deputy Head of the Institute for Tropical Technology and Environmental Protection, has pointed out that no proper solution to ease the Saigon River's pollution has been found because of the unreasonable management mechanism. "We have too many projects and too many sub-committees, which has made it unable to cooperate and connect the sub-committees," Sy said.

He cited the story about Ba Bo canal as an example to show that it is very difficult for local authorities to cooperate and join forces to settle problems.

Therefore, scientists have suggested that separated plans should be drawn up for different localities, including HCM City, Binh Duong and Tay Ninh. The plans should clearly stipulate which locality needs to do what things. After that, the implementation of the plans will be put under the coordinating of a sub-committee on protecting Saigon River.

Vietnam to learn US' pollution management mechanism

According to Lam Minh Triet, experts have suggested to apply WPA (Watershed Protection Approach) of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in managing the pollution of Saigon River.

WPA is a model of managing river water which includes six steps: monitoring, appraising, defining priority goals, developing management strategies, drawing up management plan and implementing.

"This is for the first time we use the model. The model can be applied to other river valleys in Vietnam," Triet said. "We have to do everything we can to save the Saigon River," Triet said

Also according to Triet, there are 13 projects which experts say need to be implemented right in the period of 2011-2015, with the total cost of 17 trillion dong to help ease the pollution of the Saigon River.

Local authorities of the three provinces and cities on the valleys of Saigon River will sit together to find a consensus about what to do to ease the pollution. "It is very likely that a sub-committee of Saigon River Valley will be established," Triet said.

Trees felled for cassava

Farmers in many central provinces have been destroying protective forests in order to grow cassava, the price of which has doubled, ever since the end of last year.

Local authorities are still scratching their heads in finding a solution to the problem, aware of the importance of protective forests in preventing land erosion and thus, protecting humans from natural calamities.

Pine trees have been cut down or whittled in order to make them die gradually, according to Ta Tien, acting director of the Son Ha District Forest Management Unit in central Quang Ngai Province.

"The farmers often damage pine trees in the evening, hiding them under leaves which makes it difficult to catch them," he said.

At present, the price for fresh cassava is VND2,200 (US\$0.11) a kilo while the price for dried cassava is VND4,800-5,000 (\$0.24-0.25) a kilo, an increase by two fold compared to last year. Dinh Thi Hong, from Son Cao Commune in Son Ha District, said that growing cassava cost little in terms of money and time, taking around half a year to harvest while each hectare of cassava is capable of reaping VND15-35 million (\$750-1,750) in profit. "Because of such great profits, we flocked into the forest to widen the areas available for cassava planting," she said.

The director of the Quang Ngai Province Forest Management Department, Nguyen Van Han, said that more than 200 cases of forest destruction had been detected so far this year, translating into 66ha of damaged forest. Last month alone, forest rangers uncovered 19ha of forest that had been destroyed by farmers. "Because there are only one to two forest rangers to keep watch over the forest, catching violators is especially difficult," Han said.

When caught red-handed, local farmers often run away, or say that they were hired by others to plant cassava in order that forest rangers cannot punish them.

While apprehending violators was a cause for concern, the department had little manpower for destroying cassava crops, Han said.

In central Phu Yen Province, forest rangers uncovered 15-20 cases of forest destruction for cassava growing purposes.

More than 5,100ha of forest have been destroyed in order to grow cassava according to statistics from the provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. In central Ha Tinh Province, more than 40ha of forest have been destroyed.

Though violators were fined VND500,000 (\$25) each, "regulated fines were too light to stop perpetrators from violating the law," according to the director of the South Ha Tinh Protective Forest Management Board, Vo Xuan Son.

Son said that the forest management board would call on the provincial People's Committee to increase the level of administrative punishment for violators.

Meanwhile, the director of the Quang Ngai Forest Management Department, Nguyen Van Han, confirmed that local authorities would begin legal proceedings against those destroying forests.

US\$12.2 million invested in Nam Dinh rural clean water and sanitation

Work began on July 11 for a rural clean water supply and sanitation project for seven communes in Giao Thuy and Xuan Truong districts, Nam Dinh province with a total investment of VND 248 billion (US\$12.2 million).

The project includes the construction of water treatment stations with the capacity of 9,500 cubic meters per day, a 360km water supply pipe network connected to around 1,000 households, 38 public toilets in kindergartens, schools, clinics and markets as well as power grids for the communes.

The project aims to supply clean water to 90% of the population in the communes by 2020 and raise public awareness of environmental protection, in addition to improving living conditions for local people.

The project is part of Vietnam's strategy for rural clean water supply and sanitation in the Red River Delta, which is funded by the World Bank and has been implemented since 2006.

ADB gives \$4m for biomass projects

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a regional technical assistance project to help Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos increase the use of biomass waste in agricultural sector.

The project will receive funding of US\$4 million from the Nordic Development Fund and counterpart financing of US\$600,000 from the three governments. It is due to begin this month and will be completed by the end of 2014.

Bank lends \$710m for three projects

The World Bank will lend US\$710 million for Viet Nam to implement three projects on public investment reform, irrigation and urban water supply.

The State Bank of Viet Nam and the World Bank signed loan agreements and legal documents in Ha Noi yesterday relating to the second Public Investment Reform Programme (PIR2) Development Policy, the water resource management project serving the development of the Mekong Delta and the urban water supply and sewerage project.

World Bank country director in Viet Nam Victoria Kwakwa said the funding for the three projects aimed to strengthen the efficiency of public investment, provide clean water for residents in the project areas and improve their adaptability to climate change.

The Urban Water Supply and Sewage Project Phase 1 will use a World Bank loan of US\$200 million to improve water supply systems in Quang Ninh, Ninh Binh, Quang Nam, Kien Giang, Lam Dong, Binh Duong and Binh Phuoc provinces.

The \$350 million PIR 2 will focus on checking the environment for infrastructure investment projects using public capital sources, project supervision and assessment and public finance management.

The remaining \$160 million would be granted to the water resource management project serving the rural development of the Mekong Delta. The project aims to raise the efficiency of water resources use in the region, increase agricultural productivity and improve clean water supply for rural households.

US\$143 million to be invested in irrigational works

Authorities in the Central Highlands province of Dak Nong have decided to invest VND3 trillion (US\$143 million) on irrigation works in the province's ethnic region over the next ten years.

The investment will come from the provincial budget and from a Government bond.

Around 100 new systems will be undertaken as part of the project, while 150 will be upgraded.

Once completed, the province's drainage system will ensure irrigation for 5,000ha of rice, 3,000ha of coffee trees and 4,000ha of aquaculture.

Over 200,000 people are expected to benefit from the work which will help improve living standards and promote agricultural production.

From 2006 to 2010, the province invested nearly VND1.2 trillion (\$57 million) on 65 small and medium – scale irrigational works throughout the province for the development of local agricultural production.

Recycling waste matter into bricks, concrete

The concept of converting waste matter into bricks and concrete for construction was developed by Dr. Nguyen Ngoc Chau, Head of Science Research and Environment Transfer Center in 2003 and by 2006 he and his started work on the project.

The team of scientists used solid inorganic garbage from waste treatment plants in Cau Dien and Viet Tri and sorted it into three separate categories to make bricks and concrete. They mixed gravel, rubble, nylon, wood chips and porland PCB 30 sand to make zigzag bricks for pavements.

The new bricks containing 26 percent inorganic waste are both lighter than normal bricks and cheaper as well. An environment friendly brick costs VND1, 000 while a normal brick costs VND3, 000.

New bricks can tackle heavy loads of up to 70 kilogram per square centimeter. Similarly concrete is also VND1, 500,000 cheaper than normal concrete.

Moreover, a test conducted by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment showed that the new bricks and concrete when soaked in water leave no color or smell and are environment friendly. The scientists were applauded for their work by the Ministry of Construction who has checked the standards of the products for construction purposes.

The team has transferred the technology to Thanh Nam Construction Company in the northern province of Ninh Binh who will begin manufacturing in the near future and will also offer employment to graduates in the Thanh Nam Colleges. Dr. Chau thinks this to be a productive plan as you 'Kill two birds with one stone'.

Chau said the new bricks can be used for building embankments, mounds for anchoring ships and waste cellars which will contribute to resolving the shortage of waste burial land in big cities like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Many companies in Hanoi, the central province of Ninh Thuan and other provinces nationwide have tried to contact Chau to learn more about the project, as the products are innovatively cheap and highly practical.

Chau hopes the government will assist him in carrying out the project in many other places. Though many investors are already willing to produce the bricks for commercial gains, Chau wants it used for public benefit as it is a very environment friendly product and a wider and larger scale use of it will benefit society.

Sanitation: an opportunity for collaboration

The second phase of the HCM City Nhieu Loc-Thi Nghe Environmental Sanitation Project could benefit from a public private partnership (PPP) arrangement under an agreement signed this week.

Representatives of the HCM City People's Committee, International Enterprise Singapore and the World Bank signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) under which the municipal administration will be helped to "explore the options for a viable PPP business model."

"Phase 2 will build an inceptor system for collecting all the domestic wastewater from the Nhieu Loc- Thi Nghe catchments area and District 2," said Nguyen Phuoc Thao, chair of the city administration's Steering Committee for Urban Flood Control.

"It will also build a wastewater treatment plant with an estimated capacity of 800,000 cubic meters per day," he said.

The feasibility study for Phase 2 was expected to be completed by the year-end, Thao said.

IE Singapore, a government agency that "helps foreign companies and Singapore-based enterprises for mutual development," will work with the bank to select a qualified consulting firm to conduct the PPP feasibility study for the project.

The project aims to improve the drainage system in HCM City's Nhieu Loc-Thi Nghe catchments area. Main activities in the second phase of the project include an interceptor and wastewater treatment plant.

The selected consultant will explore options for the private sector to be involved in the project, "potentially reducing the government's financing burden in infrastructure investment," the release said.

"Viet Nam's Social Economic Development Strategy and Socio-Economic Development Plan identify removing infrastructure bottlenecks as one of the country's top priorities," said Alain Barbu, Manager of Portfolio and Operations, World Bank Office in Viet Nam.

Pointing out that HCM City was highly vulnerable to tidal flooding and climate change impacts, he said sustained, large investments in critical infrastructure was needed to sustain competitiveness and provide a high quality of life for its citizens.

He noted that Phase 1 of the project, to be completed this year, "has already begun to deliver positive impacts to 2 million residents of the city in reduced flooding and improved collection of waste water."

Tan Soon Kim, Group Director for Southeast Asia, International Enterprise Singapore said the MoU was a milestone for the relationship between Singapore and Viet Nam.

Vietnam is wasting rubbish

While developed countries invest millions of USD in waste recycling for savings and environmental protection, Vietnam – a poor country – is among the top nations which are wasting this “new” resource.

Uncontrolled waste discharging and problems associated with rubbish treatment has become a big problem in Vietnam, particularly in major cities like Hanoi and HCM City.

It is estimated that Hanoi discharges around 5,000 tons of waste per day. At the annually average growth rate of 15 percent, environmentalists warn that by 2012, the capital city will have no space for burying waste.

HCM City, the country’s largest city, has over 7,000 tons of rubbish. It spends VND235 billion (\$11.7 million) from the state budget for waste treatment.

The most popular method of waste treatment in Vietnam is burning and burying waste. People still discharge rubbish to lakes, canals and rivers, causing environmental pollution.

Apart from protecting the environment, investing in waste treatment promises to yield great economic and social benefits. Some pioneers in this field have begun to earn profit from waste recycling.

According to the Vietnam Paper Association, some local companies have installed modern equipment to recycle pulp from waste, with total annual capacity up to 190,000 tons. However, only 50 percent of used papers in Vietnam are collected for recycling. This is a very low rate in comparison with 80 percent in neighboring countries like Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Master plan for Hanoi to be submitted to Prime Minister

Hanoi Master Plan to 2030 with vision to 2050 is expected to be sent to Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung for consideration by August 1.

The PM has urged the Ministry of Construction to move the plan forward, working with other ministries, and submit it by the scheduled date.

According to the latest draft of the Hanoi Master Planning Project, Ba Dinh District remains the country's political and administrative centre. The headquarters of ministries and agencies will be built in the future in Me Tri-My Dinh area in Tu Liem District or Tay Ho District.

Under the draft project, traffic routes will be built to link Hanoi's central urban areas with satellite and ecological ones, including Tay Thang Long-Son Tay, Ho Tay-Ba Vi, Thang Long Highway, Ngoc Hoi-Phu Xuyen.

The plan includes eight elevated railway routes to connect the inner city with outlying districts.

Earlier this month, the PM also approved a master plan for the socioeconomic development in Hanoi into the year 2030. According to the plan, the capital city will need between USD180 and USD190 billion to complete the various infrastructure projects in the coming decade.

The city's population is expected to climb to 7.2-7.3 million people by 2015. By 2020, the figure will rise to around 8 million. Just ten years later it is expected to be over 9 million.

Aluminum may contain toxins

For many years, recycled aluminum has been widely used to make cheap kitchen saucepans, pots, woks and fry pans, but medical experts warn that the metal is a threat to human health as it is not processed properly.

Sac Ky Hai Dang Science Technology Services JS Company recently found that a recycled aluminum pot had a lead content of 14.62mg per kilo, twice the permitted level allowed by the Ministry of Health.

Under ministry criteria for cooking appliances and food containers, lead is classed as a heavy metal that can dilute the blood, damage red blood cells and cause pale skin. Lead accumulated in the liver and kidney can cause cancer and lead poisoning, which can affect many organs.

Hoang Dong Nam from HCM City University of Technology's Inorganic Chemistry Faculty told Khoa hoc & Doi song (Science & Life) newspaper that most cheap recycled aluminum appliances were made of mixed materials that could react with foodstuffs if left long enough.

As a result, their surfaces were pockmarked and changed color, enabling lead poison to be absorbed by food, he said, adding that salty or sour foodstuff speeded up the erosion process or oxygenation.

One foreigner who bought cheap aluminum pots was alarmed recently when clear, green vegetable leaf soup turned purple overnight. Similarly, dried herbs boiled in a pot were okay when first consumed, but the next day the brew had developed into a highly alkaline slime that tasted like poison.

Professor Le Huy Ba, director of the Institute for Science, Technology and Environment Management, said that when aluminum was exposed to air, it naturally developed a thin aluminum oxide film that sealed the pure aluminum inside, protecting users.

However, in acid or alkaline conditions, the oxide film was broken, releasing hydrated Al $3+$ ions, Ba said. The ions entered the blood and caused damage to the nervous system which could result in sleeplessness, stress and dementia.

If aluminum products were made with proper technology, they were safe but many were not, he said. Many were made by small household producers. Regardless of the risk, dangerous products are still on sale to meet demand from low income earners, particularly those in rural areas.

Tran Thi Thu Hoa, a resident in Go Vap District, HCM City, said her kitchen appliances included aluminum pots and kettles that had been used for decades. Some of them changed their color to grey or black, she said, but after cleaning them, she continued using them.

Tran Van Ba, a shop owner selling household-appliances at Thanh Loc Market, District 12, said that a standard product with company logo and label cost VND30,000 to VND500,000 (US\$1.5 - 25) but those made by small establishments only cost about VND10,000 (\$0.5 cents).

The recycled products therefore still attracted customers, he said.

Forest fires in central region destroy 100ha

A fire destroyed at least 100 hectares of keo (*acacia auriculiformis*) forests in the central Phu Yen Province Saturday, making it the most severe fire in recent years, local authorities said.

The fire was reported to break out at Suoi Lanh Forest in Cam Thach Village in Phu Hoa District at 5pm last Saturday, and rapidly spread to surrounding areas.

Chairman of Phu Hoa District People's Committee Ha Trung Khang said to Vietnam News Agency that after the fire's start, the committee mobilized 400 civil servants, rangers, police and the military force in the district and from neighboring districts of Son Hoa, Dong Hoa and Tay Hoa to stamp out the fire.

The fire, put under control by 2pm yesterday, flared up again few hours later due to dry weather and strong winds.

Luong Dinh Thien, a resident in Cam Thach Village who joined to extinguish the fire, said fighting the fire manually, especially under strong winds, was extremely difficult.

Khang said the committee continued to mobilise more soldiers and police to contain the blaze.

The committee would separate the zone to keep the fire from spreading, he said.

Phu Yen Province People's Committee permanent Vice Chairman Le Van Truc is currently at the location to direct the fire fighting.

The cause of the fire is under investigation.

Hoi An tries to clean up its act

Hoi An, a World Heritage Site, opened its first solid waste treatment plant yesterday.

The plant, in Bau Oc Thuong hamlet in Cam Ha Commune, was built at a cost of VND77 billion (US\$3.7 million), most of which coming in the form of ODA credit from the French Government.

It will be able to treat 55 tones of solid waste daily.

Nguyen Van Dung, vice chairman of the Hoi An City People's Committee, said the plant would significantly reduce the amount of rubbish accumulating in a natural landfill about 3km from the town centre.

Rubbish collected from households, hotels and restaurants in the town was previously dumped in the natural landfill, which is already full and contaminating the environment.

Dung said the landfill was opened in 1993 to satisfy the town's disposal needs. At the time it was more than a kilometer from residential areas. Now the nearest houses are a mere 200 meters away as demand for accommodation and farming land has increased significantly in Cam Ha Commune, he said.

Local resident Phan Thi Phuong said she and her family had to buy bottled water to drink because well water stank.

Nguyen Nhu Muoi, chairman of the Cam Ha Commune People's Committee, said the landfill was seriously affecting the health of about 1,000 of the commune's 1,600 households and that it had been responsible for outbreaks of petechial fever and cholera.

At the new plant, rubbish will be classified into two main categories – organic and inorganic. Biodegradable rubbish will be composted to serve agriculture, while inorganic waste will be recycled. The remainder, if non-polluting, will be dumped in the landfill.

Another plant for hospital waste will open at the end of this year. Meanwhile, another solid waste treatment facility and a network to collect rubbish will be completed in 2012.

Raphael Nguyen, director of Vinci Construction Grands Projects, said the plants would improve the quality of life for the people of Hoi An and protect the ecological environment.

About 82 tones of rubbish are discharged daily by households, hotels and restaurants in Hoi An, according to the Natural Resources and Environment Bureau.

Only between 60-65 per cent of the rubbish currently goes in the landfill, the rest is recycled by families and used as fertilizer.

According to the Hoi An Trade and Tourism Bureau, tourism and related activities accounted for more than 70 per cent of the city's gross domestic product last year. The total number of visitors to Hoi An was about 3.5 million – an average year-on-year increase of 11 per cent between 2006-10.

Australian tourist Andrew Alason said the Hoai River was badly polluted and emitted a bad smell.

"The city authority really needs to do something to save the river," he said.

Factory sludge pollutes water

An alcohol production company shut down four years ago floods neighboring homes with black smelly water every time it rains.

The company, Ha Tay Alcohol Wine and Liquor JSC in Tam Hiep Commune, in Phuc Tho District, was founded in 1960 as a State-owned firm. It covers thousands of sq. meters.

It started losing money and was shut down in 2007, said chairman of the Tam Hiep People's Committee, Nguyen Van Kha.

After four years of neglect, most of the company's equipment and machines have gone rusty. Whenever it rains, black water from the site flows into a small reservoir on the site and then overflows onto nearby residential quarter.

Do Dinh Van, a resident in the commune's My Giang Village, said the water had an offensive chemical smell.

Nguyen Van Loc, head of Thuong Hiep Village, said the company did not have a sewerage system and that its waste water flowed into the commune's system and polluted many villages including his own, Hoa Thon and Dien Cat.

"We reported the issue to local authorities, but they have not taken any proper measures," he said.

Although no tests have been done, residents are worried because the number of cancer patients in the commune has soared.

Head of the Tam Hiep Medical Station Dao Trong Hai said that last year 14 people in the commune died of cancer, double the number in 2007. Most of the patients were aged from 55 to 70. They suffered cancer of the liver, lung and stomach.

"I have worked at the medical station for more than 20 years, but have never seen so many cancer patients," he said.

Chairman Kha said the People's Committee did not have the power to punish the company. "We are only responsible for checking and supervision," he said.

Inspections carried out this year showed that waste water flowing over from a storage reservoir when it rained was four times the level allowed.

The committee has reported the situation to the district's police and Department of Natural Resources and Environment. They fined the company several times, said Kha.

Meanwhile, a director of the company, Nguyen Thi Nhan, said that the company had temporarily stopped work and would restructure to become a building materials company.

Nhan claimed that waste water from the company could not flow away because construction sites in the district had broken the company's water pipes.

Geo-parks provide jobs for locals

Local communities have an important role to play in the management and development of geo-parks, said experts at the second Asia-Pacific Geo-parks Network Symposium held in Ha Noi yesterday.

The symposium's theme revolved around sustainable development in the region through the promotion of geo-parks, which are defined by UNESCO as a territory encompassing one or more sites of scientific importance, not only for geographic reasons, but also by virtue of archaeological, ecological or cultural value.

Dong Van Karst Plateau Geo-park, located in the northernmost province of Ha Giang, is the first geo-park recognized by the Global Geo-parks Network in Viet Nam, and also the second geo-park in Southeast Asia.



The Dong Van Stone Plateau in Ha Giang Province is typical of the wonderlands that can be managed by local communities.

According to Dr Pham Khoi Nguyen, Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment, concepts such as geo-parks, geo-heritage and geo-tourism, though relatively new, have already taken shape and are a strong trend in many societies. According to Katherine Muller Marin, Representative of the Ha Noi-based UNESCO Office in Viet Nam, geo-parks such as Dong Van promote the concept of conservation while stimulating educational opportunities and socio-economic activities.

Marin said the geo-park model was particularly valuable for Asian countries such as Viet Nam, which had vulnerable and disadvantaged populations that inhabited mountainous and remote areas. "It is necessary to ensure that ethnic minorities and local communities can participate in the management of geo-parks as well as continue to benefit from the natural and cultural resources found there."

She also added that it was important to ensure the intangible heritage, including customs, traditions, knowledge, lifestyles and other local practices, are taken into consideration and respected by government officials and everyone else who came into contact with the local people. Patrick McKeever, representative of the Global Geo-parks Network cum Co-Chairperson of European Geo-parks Network said local people should be empowered to take care of their own natural resources in a way that respects their traditions.

McKeever also urged everyone to respect the "philosophy of geo-parks" that take into account animal rights and other ethical issues, in particular, he said shops selling wildlife or gemstones were forbidden in geo-parks, warning that those who do not respect the principles would be excluded from the geo-parks network.

Sen Chin Ly, Vice Chairman of the People's Committee of Ha Giang Province, said the province was determined to develop Dong Van Karst Plateau Geo-park in line with international standards set by the Global Geo-parks Network and hoped to receive more support from international organizations and investors to develop the geo-park in a sustainable way. The symposium drew over 150 delegates from 16 Asia-Pacific and European countries.

Tri An Hydroelectric Power Station sets up the water moderating plan



In fact, during dry months, the company managed to supply adequate water for lowland areas to push back saltwater

This year's rainy season is forecast to be unfavorable and difficult to predict the effects. Therefore, in respect of water drainage as well as drought fight and saltwater resistance for the period of 2011 – 2012, Tri An Hydroelectric Power Station has proposed a detailed plan to sustain its safe operation.

In a forecast from meteorological and hydrographic forecast station for South Vietnam, the year 2011's rainy season is coming sooner than in many previous years. In the first half of the season, the rainfall will be higher than in previous years, particularly in August which is defined as the peak of rainfall.

Realizing such weather conditions and in order to flood fighting and prevention and water moderation, in these dry months, Tri An Hydroelectric Power Station has completed the maintenance and repair of key machines and devices to ensure the normal operation during rains and floods.

Also, electricity supply for water overflow dykes will be maintained to fully supply the main electricity source and implement the standby safety for dyke foundation and kill termites for dykes at Tri An; prepare an adequate amount of spare materials for flood and storm control; combine with the meteorological and hydrographic forecast station for South Vietnam to provide timely information about flood, storm, water flowing into lake and rains at riverhead stations, etc.

In addition to the daily updating of meteorological and hydrographic conditions, when flood and storm are forecast, the station will moderate reservoir and regulate water overflow properly. Before the initial overflow during season of rains and floods, the company will send the prior written notice to Steering Board of Flood Control before 2 days so that residential areas at lowlands keep informed to reduce any possible loss. Particularly, the company in combination with affected areas will restrict the water moderation to facilitate the flood control at Dong Nai, Binh Duong and Ho Chi Minh city, etc.

Not only has Tri An set up the plan for flood control, but they continue to do research and build up the plan for drought control and saltwater prevention during dry season of 2011 – 2012. In dry season, Tri An's water moderation will be regulated to push back saltwater with an average volume of 60m³/s per day at least.

In fact, during its 20-year operation, the water volume flowing into the lake is ranging from 80-120m³/s. However, in order to prevent saltwater invasion during dry season, the operational capacity still remains above 200m³/s.

As forecast, the drought in 2011 – 2012 dry seasons is likely to happen, which can affect electricity generation and water supply for saltwater invading protection in lowland areas. Concerning these facts and following the direction from Vietnam Electricity Corporation, Tri An Hydroelectric Station will liaise with local authorities and lowland clean water supply units to agree on the cooperation of the optimal operation between electricity and water supply for lowland area's demands.

City port faces development hurdles

Nguyen Xuan Thanh, from the HCM City University of Economics, spoke to Sai Gon Giai Phong (Liberated Sai Gon) about ways to develop ports in HCM City.

What do you think about the potential of HCM City's seaports?

Seaport complex No 5, comprising ports in Ba Ria-Vung Tau and Dong Nai provinces and HCM City, receives the largest volume of cargo in the country, with the seaport in HCM City topping the list.

However, things have changed significantly.

A seaport must meet two conditions to develop well: The first is to have a favorable geographic location, and the second, a market for import and export, production, and consumption of goods.

In the seaport complex No 5, ports in HCM City do not have as many or as extensive canals as Cai Mep-Thi Vai in Ba Ria-Vung Tau.

The Long Tau, the main river leading to the port complex in HCM City, is only seven metres deep compared to the 14 meters of the river and canals in Cai Mep-Thi Vai.

The Soai Rap River in HCM City has not been dredged. Even if it is, it will not have as many favorable conditions as the rivers or canals in Cai Mep-Thi Vai.

Seaports in HCM City have only one advantage – that it has a vibrant market for production and doing business.

However, production activities in HCM City have reduced due to the production activities in Dong Nai and Binh Duong Provinces.

In addition, the city is tardy in investing in traffic facilities to serve the seaport activities. Inter-provincial Highway 25B leading to Tan Cang is always congested. The road leading to Hiep Phuoc Seaport is narrow. Traffic on roads to seaports on the Sai Gon River is always heavy.

With all those hurdles, I think port activities in HCM City will be limited in future, leaving the top position to Cai Mep-Thi Vai.

HCM City's ports were built a 100 years ago and have developed since. So is it not unfounded to say they will no longer develop like Cai Mep-Thi Vai?

Under the plan to develop seaports in Viet Nam through 2025, ports in Cai Mep-Thi Vai will be developed into an international seaport gateway for the eastern and south-western regions and HCM City.

The Ministry of Transport and other ministries and sectors have been investing a lot of money in developing this complex.

The Ministry of Transport is expanding National Highway 51 to connect Dong Nai and Binh Duong Provinces with Ba Ria-Vung Tau. Work on the HCM City-Long Thanh-Dau Giay Expressway, an expressway that will connect all key economic zones in the south with Ba Ria-Vung Tau, has begun.

In addition, the Bien Hoa – Vung Tau Expressway and a rail route connecting the Central Highlands with Ba Ria – Vung Tau will be built.

With a modern traffic system to connect the Cai Mep-Thi Vai seaport complex with the large production markets in the eastern and western regions and the Central Highlands, it is very likely that [it] will become the largest port complex.

At the time, it is understandable that the operation of ports in HCM City would be constrained or limited.

Apart from that, due to the depth of its rivers and canals, many ports in Cai Mep – Thi Vai can receive large ships sailing directly to Europe and America, which will help businesses save a lot of time and money.

This is a big advantage for the port complex in Cai Mep-Thi Vai compared to many others, including those in HCM City.

You don't seem to discern the full potential of the Soai Rap River. The city plans to dredge the river to up to 12.5 metres depth to receive much larger vessels. The city is the country's largest consumption market. So importers really want to import products via HCM City. What do you think?

The project to dredge the Soai Rap is just about to be developed. How to develop it successfully needs to be considered and planned carefully. Meanwhile, the rivers and canals in Cai Mep – Thi Vai have already been put into operation.

Moreover, when the city finishes dredging the Soai Rap, ports in HCM City will compete with those in Long An and Tien Giang Provinces.

Long An and Tien Giang are currently making plans to build ports and waiting for the Soai Rap to be dredged. Then they will build the ports.

Surely, ports in these two provinces have more advantages than those in HCM City since they are closer to the sea.

I do not quite agree with the point that since HCM City is the largest consumer market, importers will prefer ports in HCM City. I think with good traffic infrastructure, importing goods into Cai Mep – Thi Vai and then transporting them to HCM City is very simple.

How long it takes to transport goods from Cai Mep-Thi Vai to HCM City depends on traffic conditions.

Dong Nai grows greener - and greener

Authorities in the southern province of Dong Nai have set long-term targets for building a green sustainable economy, with strategies that protect and expand the forest cover.

Since closing the forest gates in 1997, the province has become the largest forest area in the southwestern region, with green cover representing more than 54 per cent of the natural land, and forest cover 30 per cent.

The province is home to tropical green forests covering a total 194,000 ha, concentrated in the Vinh Cuu, Tan Phu, and Dinh Quan districts.

At least 110,000ha of the area is natural forest functioning as a major lung for the entire southern region.

Of the total forest coverage, special-use forests account for 48 per cent, protective forests 27.7 per cent, and production forests 24.3 per cent.

The provincial government has improved the quality of forests, with many poor forests protected and developed into natural ones boasting an increasingly diverse floral carpet and conservation of rare and valuable animal species registered in Viet Nam's Red Book.

To Thanh Buong, deputy director of the provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, said provincial authorities planned to develop strict policies to protect forests.

Last year alone, authorities' uncovered 650 violations of forest management and protection regulations, with six violators being punished criminally, he said.

Economic growth

Dong Nai forests play a crucial role in developing the local economy, experts says.

The province's forests churn out 3.2 million tones of oxygen each year, given that each ha of forested land generates 16 tones of oxygen annually.

The forests act as a gigantic factory purifying the air for the southern key economic zone.

They also help to retain water sources to supply fresh water for more than 10 million local residents and industrial development in southeastern provinces and cities, experts say.

With a focus on a green and sustainable economy, the provincial administration in 2004 established the Dong Nai Natural and Cultural Reserve by merging Ma Da, Hieu Liem and Vinh An forestry farms, and the Resistance Base D Historical Relics Management Board.

The aim is to restore the bio-diversity of the indigenous natural forest ecosystem in the Dong Nai River basin, extend the natural conservation area to Cat Tien National Park, and conserve the habitat and migration places of wildlife.

Other goals include the preservation and promotion of cultural and historical values of relics, and development of eco-tourism.

Tran Van Mui, director of Dong Nai Natural and Cultural Reserve, said the reserve was part of the Truong Son ecosystem and was one of 200 major ecological areas in the world certified as a priority ecological site by the Viet Nam Conservation Fund.

The reserve is also among the largest special-use forests in Viet Nam, covering more than 100,000ha of land and water surface.

The gradual recovery of forests has helped hasten the return of more rare animals like gayals, bears, primates and Asian elephants.

The reserve is home to many kinds of rare and precious plants and animals registered in Viet Nam's Red Book of endangered species.

At the World Network of Biosphere Reserves meeting in Germany in April, 18 new biosphere reserves were added, including Dong Nai Biosphere Reserve, whose former name was Nam Cat Tien Biosphere Reserve.

Covering 969ha, the reserve comprises Cat Tien National Park, Dong Nai Natural and Cultural Reserve and Tri An Reservoir.

The reserve is carrying out a project to replace 3,000ha of exotic plants with native large-timber plants in Resistance Base D over the 2009-2015 period at a total investment of VND130 billion (US\$6.5 million).

Buong said the plan called for more protection of forests by 2015 and afforestation of 4,350ha and another 4,800ha by 2020.

Petrol leak pollutes commune water

Hundreds of residents in northern Bac Giang Province's Duc Thang Commune have been forced to use contaminated water for their daily activities because of a leaking underground tank from a nearby enterprise.

Three months ago, more than 40 households in Hung Thinh Village, Duc Thang Commune in Hiep Hoa District reported the smell of petrol and the water had turned oily. Oil slicks were also seen in neighboring ponds and rice fields.

The incident was reported to the district authority. Hiep Hoa District People's Committee found that gasoline leaked from underground storage tanks owned by Ha Quy Co Ltd.

Several years ago, the company installed six underground storage tanks with a capacity of 10,000 litres each.

The company has been ordered to repair leaking tanks and build a 3,000-litre clean water storage supply for residents while the committee studies the environmental losses.

Nguyen Trong Ngoc, a local resident whose house is about 50m from the leaking tanks, said water from his well was so contaminated that his vegetable crops died after being watered.

"We have to buy clean water at VND19,000 (US\$0.95) per 20-litre bottle," he said. "It has been three months. Clean water is all we want. Something must be done."

Ngoc said about 20,000 litres of gasoline had leaked out and contaminated water resources. Several meetings were held with company representatives but the situation has not improved.

Resident Nguyen Van Phuong said the company's water storage was installed far from residential areas and it was too small to supply enough water for about 180 people.

Deputy head of the district's Natural Resources and Environment Office Nguyen Quang San said the company had been asked to install water filters free of charge.

The district's People's Committee Chairman Nguyen Thi Hoa said the company had been ordered to move all storage tanks out of the residential areas and promptly collect leaked gasoline. The company had also been asked to compensate affected households.

Climate change needs long-term plan

Viet Nam's climate change adaptation strategies need a long-term focus and should be integrated into mainstream policies targeting sustainable rural development and poverty reduction, experts said at a seminar in HCM City yesterday.

Truong Hong Tien, Deputy Director General of the Viet Nam National Mekong Committee, said that global warming and its impacts were inevitable and very much in evidence.

"Although the negotiations at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change is crucial to our efforts in tackling climate change, we are aware that whatever limits are imposed on greenhouse gas emissions today, some level of warming of the earth will take place."

He said the ongoing global warming process would lead to an increase in weather extremes, causing severe droughts and excessive rain.

These events have become more frequent and intense in many parts of the world, and the Lower Mekong Basin was particularly vulnerable to these hazards, Tien said.

Over the past few years, an increase in damage caused by extreme weather events was witnessed in the lower Mekong Basin, he said.

"From the mountainous areas of northern Laos to the low-lying Mekong Delta of Viet Nam, the impacts of climate change are being felt thoroughly," Tien said.

"We can hear news more often about floods, droughts and storms which affect the well-being and livelihoods of weather-dependent communities."

Tien said people in the lower Mekong River basin have been adapting themselves to the surroundings for centuries.

For instance, raised houses were typical in areas that used to be flood-prone, Tien.

"You can also look around and see that various agencies, civil society organisations, international, inter-governmental organisation and even the private sector in the region are making efforts to alleviate the crisis and minimise damage caused by climate change at the local level," he said.

"Sharing experiences and exchange information on these and other areas such as climate related risk management will certainly contribute to our understanding on how to deal with the climate change and enable us to mainstream adaptation and disaster risk reduction into development planning and implementation."

The "First Meeting of Climate Change Adaptation Demonstration Projects in the Lower Mekong Basin: Sharing Lessons and Experiences," organised by the Mekong River Commission (MRC), aimed to be a platform for development practitioners to exchange experiences and learn from other existing and/or planned adaptation actions in the Lower Mekong Basin.



Residents in My Son Commune, in Nghe An Province, dredge a local canal used to irrigate crops. The region has been hit by a severe drought.

The meeting gathered more than 100 participants, comprising senior government officials of the MRC's member countries and dialogue partners (Myanmar and China), development and implementing partners, and especially practitioners working on demonstration projects in climate change adaptation in the Lower Mekong Basin.

The MRC has developed the Climate Change and Adaptation Initiative in order to assist riparian countries in adaptation planning and implementation.

Lack of clarity

In a technical paper submitted at the conference that reviewed adaptation approaches, tools and methods as well as projects implemented in the Lower Mekong Basin (LMB) nations, the MRC said "adaptation is still not a well understood concept."

While there were many tools and methods available for adaptation planning, guidance on how to select approaches was lacking.

In Viet Nam, the national adaptation strategies have mainly focused on reducing the risk posed by natural hazards, the report noted.

Viet Nam's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has been carrying out a US\$109 million plan to restore mangroves along the country's coastline, it said.

Other adaptation activities are being implemented as part of the National Strategy for Disaster Prevention, Response and Mitigation, which included various "mandatory requirements for flood safety and security in residential areas," the report said.

However, "the strategies focus on emergency responses rather than long-term adaptation to the future climate change.

The report said Cambodia has carried out 98 projects to address climate hazards through national disaster management response projects.

However, recent studies showed that preparedness to respond to extreme climate events was quite low, it added.

Firms to collect non-degradable waste

The General Department of Environment (GDE) is about to issue a draft decision regulating the responsibility of production and trading companies in reclaiming non-degradable waste such as batteries.

According to an official from the Legislation Bureau of the GDE, Le Van Hung, once approved, the draft will concrete the implementation of the Law on Environmental Protection.

The draft would provide enterprises with detailed instructions on how to collect and process expired or discarded products, said Hung.

Initially drafted six years ago, the law set out to compel production and trading units to collect expired or discarded products, including batteries, but without much result, Hung added.

Once complete, the draft will be submitted to the Government for consideration and approval before coming into effect.

A recent GDE survey found that most manufacturers in Viet Nam were aware that batteries become toxic when expired, necessitating their collection and treatment.

Aware of the harmful nature of expired batteries, Dry Cell and Storage Battery JSC (PINACO), a leading battery company in Viet Nam, invested in technologies aimed at treating their industrial waste two years ago.

A company official said that it was currently completing procedures in hiring a unit to treat expired batteries, which it used to recycle.

Deputy Director of the Tia Sang Battery JSC To Van Thanh said that the State needed to regulate procedures based on collecting and discarding batteries.

A report released by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) showed that around 40,000 tones of leaden batteries were discharged in Viet Nam last year. The figure is expected to increase to nearly 70,000 tones by 2015.

According to the report, almost all discarded batteries were manually recycled at craft villages, negatively affecting people's health and the environment.

Dong Mai craft village in northern Hung Yen Province has attracted more than 500 laborers to collect batteries.

Nguyen Van Nam, head of the Economic Bureau at the Hung Yen Province People's Committee, said that the committee would move the village to a place far from residential areas as wastewater, smoke and dust, caused by lead, had significantly polluted the environment.

The IFC estimated that Viet Nam's current 28 million motorbikes and 1.5 million cars would increase by between 20 to 25 per cent per year. According to the forecast, Viet Nam would have around 60 million motorbikes and cars by 2020, synonymous with millions of expired batteries turning to waste.

The corporation pinpointed that such an amount of batteries would be enough to provide material to lead refinery factories in meeting domestic demand.

Thanh said that it had been difficult to collect expired batteries as most been sold to scrap-iron dealers at competitive prices that battery manufacturers such as the Tia Sang Battery JSC could not pay.

Most battery companies, especially import companies, admitted they had never considered collecting expired batteries.

Regarding this issue, the former chief inspector of the Ministry of Science and Technology, Le Van Kieu, said that it would be difficult to encourage import companies to collect expired batteries without economic benefits.

"It would be a challenge for them if they collected expired batteries merely for environmental protection purposes," Kieu said, adding that companies were willing to pay 10 per cent of their profits to local authorities for the collection of expired batteries.

He recommended that enterprises take responsibility on their own and co-ordinate with local authorities in collecting expired products.

"While it might be a little late, it is essential that the draft is issued as soon as possible," Kieu said.

Japan offers \$129m for water

The Japanese Government has decided to provide between 10 and 15 billion JPY (\$128.9 million - \$193.3 million) for a water project in Viet Nam through the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA), Nikkei said.

As early as this year, JICA will either loan or invest the sum in a joint venture to be set up by Japanese and Vietnamese firms, the Japanese daily of Nikkei reported, adding that Viet Nam's Viwaseen Corp. and Japan's Metawater Co. are expected to participate.

The project will involve building water supply networks and sewerage treatment facilities in Ha Noi and its environs. JICA is expected to start an official project assessment this month.

In addition to the water system, JICA will soon start screening other foreign-aid projects, such as school construction in Viet Nam and an anti-poverty initiative in Pakistan.

APEC tackles flooding due to climate change

Members of the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) should join together to reduce the increasing threats of abnormal floods from climate change, a workshop was told yesterday in the central coastal city of Da Nang.

"For many member economies, abnormal floods pose the most severe natural threats and the situation has become worse as the result of climate change – one of the biggest human threats to humanity in 21st century," said Nguyen Nguyet Nga, director general of the Department of Multilateral Economic Co-operation under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Nga referred to severe floods in Taiwan in 2009, in the Philippines, mainland China and Viet Nam in 2010, and in Australia and Indonesia early this year. "We hope APEC member economies, together with relevant international and regional organizations, will not only share information and experiences but also discuss how best to work together," said Nga.

The two-day workshop, themed "Facing abnormal flood disasters: New vision for APEC economies", was the first APEC activity focusing on flood mitigation and management.

Delegates focused on assessing floods in APEC members in the recent years, best practices on responding to abnormal flood disaster, emergency preparedness and early warning methods.

They also drew a new vision about strengthening community responses in facing floods.

According to Dao Xuan Hoc, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, during the last 10 years, up to seven typhoons affected Viet Nam annually, killing about 450 people each year - mostly in floods.

Meanwhile, economic losses per year from natural disasters are estimated at between 1.2-1.5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product.

Hoc attributed the increase in floods to climate change and global warming, which was boosting annual rainfall everywhere in Viet Nam.

Upstream deforestation was said to make river flooding much worse.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Viet Nam has witnessed many floods in the past decade, including the November 1999 flood in the Central region, which was the most severe in more than 100 years. Another flood in November 2008 in Ha Noi and 17 provinces killed 84 people and caused US\$316 million in damage.

Viet Nam is forecast to be one of the countries most vulnerable to rises in sea levels. According to the worst scenario from the Government's recent Climate Change and Sea Level Rise Scenarios for Viet Nam, by 2100, if sea level rises by 1 metre, about 40 per cent of the Mekong river delta and three per cent of coastal provinces could be affected.

In addition, 20 per cent area of the country's biggest economic hub, HCM City, could be submerged. Flooding in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta could last for up to four months a year.

While praising Viet Nam's initiative to hold the workshop, APEC Secretariat executive director Muhamad Noor Yacob said the organisation pledged to continue funding projects on early warning of natural disasters, prevention, and preparedness.

City changes tune on solid waste imports

The HCM City People's Committee has revoked its approval of a plan to import 10,000 tonnes of solid waste meant for testing waste management facilities belonging to a private firm.

The solid waste treatment plant in question is located in the city's Binh Chanh District.

In an official dispatch sent on Thursday, the city administration directed the Department of Natural Resources and Environment to suspend formalities for the import of plastic and paper waste materials by the Viet Nam Waste Solutions Inc (VWS).

The company runs the 128ha, US\$90 million Da Phuoc Integrated Waste Management Facility.

The new document replaces another official dispatch issued on July 12 that carried the HCM City People's Committee's approval of a proposal by the department to allow the VWS to import wasted materials for use at its facility.

It also urges relevant agencies to review the city's waste sorting programme and to report related issues to the HCM City People's Committee by mid-August. VWS executives could not be reached by Viet Nam News for comment, but they were quoted by the Tuoi Tre (Youth) newspaper as saying they wanted to import waste materials for the test run of their facility because HCM City cannot provide them with sorted solid waste.

The VWS, a subsidiary of California Waste Solutions Inc, began operating the Da Phuoc facility in 2007.

The facilities scope activities include sanitary landfill; composting operations; recycling processes; multiple wastewater treatment processes; landfill gas systems; and environmental monitoring systems.

The facility, which can treat some 3,000 tonnes of waste per day, is the country's most advanced and largest environmental foreign investment project.

"I support the city authority's suspension. It's a timely decision that addresses concerns of residents," Pham Van Dong, head of the Economy and Budgets Department under the HCM City People's Council, told Tuoi Tre.

"In my opinion, waste from the city should be used for the test run of facilities at the Da Phuoc Complex. This would help check if the machines and equipment at the complex can work with waste generated by the city."

Bui Cach Tuyen, Deputy Minister for Natural Resources and Environment, said in an earlier document sent to the HCM City Department of Natural Resources and Environment that the ministry's Waste Management and Environment Improvement Bureau did not allow the import of any kind of waste into the country. The bureau supported the recycling.