

Business Briefs

Oil

Diesel shortage in Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic, which gets its oil from Venezuela, awoke to a shortage of diesel fuel on July 16. Observers believe the shortage is due to Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez's efforts to facilitate the multinationals' resource grab with a proposed hemispheric strategic oil reserve.

The shortage is critical, since the island has been suffering from electricity shortages for the past two years, and industries depend on their own diesel-run generating plants during the frequent power outages. Blackouts now last 20 hours per day, and without the independent generators, now out of commission because of the diesel shortage, the island is in the dark.

During the first half of July, Panama, also dependent on Venezuelan and Mexican oil, has been experiencing a gasoline shortage, a first for Panama, which, even during the 1973-74 fake "Arab oil embargo," never experienced a fuel shortage. The official story is that "a tanker with gasoline" was unable to unload, but Panama has its own refinery and imports crude oil, not gasoline.

Computers

Superconducting chip prototype produced

Conductus, Inc., a small high-tech company in Silicon Valley, California has developed a technique to manufacture computer chips from higher-temperature superconducting materials.

The material, a fragile ceramic, stays energy-loss free at a higher temperature than the conventional superconductors, which must be kept only 4° above absolute zero to maintain their superconducting characteristics.

A company official told the July 13 *Wall Street Journal* that it will concentrate on low-power applications, such as super-fast computers, sensors, and other electronics appli-

cations, rather than large-scale magnet and energy systems. The factory making the semiconductor chips can turn out 25,000 per year and the company expects to be profitable by 1994.

Shipbuilding

Japan christens high-speed seacraft

On July 11, Japan's largest shipbuilder, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, christened the world's first superconducting propulsion ship, the *Yamato 1*, at the Kobe shipyard. The ship is a prototype for future high-speed seacraft.

Superconducting coils of niobium and titanium in thrusters under the ship create a magnetic field. That field is then repulsed by an electric current circulating in the water medium through the ship's thrusters which propel the vehicle. The water-propelled thrusters are believed to minimize vibration and maintenance problems associated with conventional screw propellers. Sea trials begin next spring.

Environmentalism

Energy conservation kills with indoor air

Indoor air pollution, caused by measures to reduce oil burning through energy conservation, have created the most serious environmental hazard in Sweden today, according to Arto Hamberg, manager of corporate relations for Sweden's ABB Atom.

In a paper submitted to a recent "Info 90" conference in Dallas, Texas, Hamberg reported that both nuclear and conservation "strategies have contributed to the reduction of oil consumption, but from the environmental point of view the conservation strategy has been literally fatal," he said. A government committee charged with studying allergic reactions in Sweden found that 1,300 Swedes died due to asthma in 1985, up from about 700 in 1965. "The primary reason given by the

committee is indoor pollution due to insufficient ventilation of houses which have been made too tight in order to save energy," he said.

Hamberg called the campaign to conserve energy through insulation of buildings "the most severe national environmental crisis in decades."

The allergy committee's chairman has stated publicly that increasing the ventilation in Swedish buildings to a healthful level would require additional generating capacity equivalent to two to three 1,000-megawatt nuclear stations. Hamberg noted that public acceptance of nuclear energy in Sweden has increased every year for the past 10 years.

Recent studies by NASA and the Environmental Protection Agency also reveal that indoor air in modern office buildings is often 100 times more polluted than outdoor air. The Clean Air Act allocates close to \$62 billion a year to control "air toxics" in outdoor air, but this is wasted, since the concentrations are negligible and people spend an average 90% of the time indoors.

AIDS

Leading killer of black women aged 15-44

A new study shows that AIDS is now the leading killer of black women aged 15-44, i.e., of child-bearing age, in New York and New Jersey. The study, performed by researchers at the Atlanta Centers for Disease Control, is being published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, according to the July 11 *New York Times*.

The study also revealed that, among all women aged 15-44 in New York and New Jersey, AIDS was the third leading cause of death in 1987, which was the most recent year in which state figures were available. "Preliminary figures for 1988 showed that nationally deaths rose again, and had quadrupled in four years," the *Times* noted. If the trend continues, AIDS will be the fourth leading cause of death nationally among this age group by 1991, after cancer, heart attacks, and accidents.

Researchers pointed out that the figures

here are grossly understated "because some deaths caused by the AIDS virus do not meet technical AIDS case definitions, some AIDS deaths are undiagnosed and some are not reported."

Africa

'Democracy' code for austerity, Times admits

The World Bank campaign for "better governance" and "democracy" in Africa has the aim of bringing regimes into power that can better impose austerity on the populations of Africa, the July 14 *Times* of London admitted.

In an article entitled, "The turbulent year that turned the tide for autocrats," Gregory Kronsten exults that "the one-party monopoly" system of the past is "being discarded," and that Britain is using its "influence behind the scenes to push for liberalization.

"The World Bank introduced the element of 'better governments' in its report issued in November, 'Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth.' This suggested that greater accountability tended to motivate institutions and individuals and to make austerity measures that the bank is advocating widely in Africa more palatable."

Labor

NAACP head Hooks slams service economy

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) executive director Benjamin Hooks attacked the so-called service economy and blamed the deindustrialization of the United States for the worsening economic conditions of the black community, in an interview in the July 8 *Los Angeles Times*.

"There has been a definite retrogression—a lack of progress among those who are the poorest among us," Hooks said. "But many black folk have not seen that one of the major problems is that this country's undergone a

structural transformation, and none of us—white or black—are prepared for it. . . . There was a time when we were making steel and tires and rubber and cars, and poor people, without benefit of a great deal of education, were able to make decent salaries."

But now, Hooks said, "We're becoming, for what it's worth, a service-oriented society. Now this is a vast transformation, and [people] don't understand that the kid on the block who, 40 years ago, could go over to Ford and make out an application and have a reasonable chance for getting wages that were twice, three times, what minimum wage was, can't do that any more. They were very good jobs. They are now, but there's no growth. The whole industrial concept is dying right in front of us. We have a real problem of where our young people go."

Technology

FRA finds maglev feasible for U.S.

Operational magnetically levitated (maglev) transport systems are economically and technologically feasible for the U.S., the Federal Railroad Administration announced July 16.

FRA administrator Gil Carmichael stated, "Most major industrialized nations are engaged in a race for leadership in high-speed ground transportation technology. A major policy issue facing us today is whether we should join this race or be content with being a consumer for transportation technology developed and manufactured overseas."

An FRA report found that there "appear to be opportunities for the U.S. to assert leadership in this technology and its applications." Some cities and regions interested in maglev have stated they will buy less technologically advanced systems from the West Germans or Japanese during the 1990s if the U.S. does not develop its own.

The study notes that "private industry is not prepared at this time to commit its own resources to the significant funding necessary" to develop maglev technology. Carmichael recommends that further study be done to decide the government's role.

Briefly

● **COFFEE PRODUCING** nations, most of them poor and some waging a costly war on drugs, have lost \$4 billion in the past year since the international coffee pact expired, the *Journal of Commerce* reported July 16. The retail price of coffee has not been reduced in proportion, meaning that the multinationals are making billions.

● **NEW TUBERCULOSIS** cases in the U.S. rose 5% in 1989 to 23,495, some 9,000 cases higher than the Atlanta Centers for Disease Control had projected, the *New York Times* reported July 15. "We're seeing some really disturbing patterns," said Dr. Dixie Snider, director of CDC's TB control.

● **NASA** scientists will try to save the Japanese lunar mission, which suffered a transmitter failure upon entering lunar orbit, preventing it from sending back data. Experts are planning an attempt to get the mother ship, now in Earth orbit, back into lunar orbit.

● **INDIA'S** external debt position is deteriorating, according to the *World Debt Tables* for 1989-90 computed by the World Bank. The report projects India's total external debt in 1990, excluding that owed to the International Monetary Fund, at \$69.78 billion, up from \$54.94 billion in 1988, and forecasts a rise to \$77.43 billion in 1991.

● **THE SOVIETS** agreed to buy a 20-mile, \$607 million magnetically levitated train from Japan to connect Moscow with Sheremetyovo International Airport, the July 12 *Wall Street Journal* reported. Construction is to be completed by 1996.

● **THE RED CHINESE** launched the first of its Long March 2E cluster carrier rockets, which carried Pakistani and Australian satellites into orbit, according to the July 17 *NASA News*.