

GLOBAL UP-TO-DATE

A **CGS** Publication



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The world around us is changing rapidly. Wars, new turn in global politics, human rights issues are occurring every day, posing new challenges and concerns. Global Up-to-Date is an initiative by Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) which will work as a hub for explaining the contemporary global issues.

The regular briefs will focus and explain the issues related to International Politics, Economy, Security, Human Rights, and Development. There will be a monthly printed version newsletter containing briefs of all the contemporary global important issues. The online version contains regular updates of the pressing issues along with the PDF version of the newsletter.



Fukushima Water Release: Environmental Poison Diluted With Political Rivalry

Debi Karmakar



"The significance of the Fukushima water release is primarily political and environmental," said Stefan Angrick, a senior economist at Moody's Analytics. The Japanese government began releasing waste water from the ruined Fukushima Daichi nuclear facility into the Pacific Ocean on August 24, and the process will continue for the next 30 years. It has been met with opposition from the United Nations human rights group, Greenpeace, South Korean citizens, and Pacific Island nations. Although it has been approved by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), there is no way to rule out the possibility that the remaining Tritium poses a long-term life threat to human health.

Japan decided to release the treated water in order to empty the one thousand tanks because it requires the land occupied by the tanks to construct new decommissioning equipment. They are also concerned that a natural calamity could cause the tanks to burst, so it is preferable to release the treated water gradually before it is released untreated into the ocean. Essentially, the nuclear materials inside the reactor become so hot that they begin to melt. Workers inundate the reactor with water to halt the meltdown. Approximately 350 million gallons of water have been stored on-site in over 1000 containers. Advanced Liquid Processing System was developed by the Japanese government to remove radioactive isotopes from water.

"Tritium" is one radioactive isotope that cannot be removed by this process. Tritium is a hydrogen isotope. Since hydrogen is a component of water, there is no filter that can eradicate it. Tritium is naturally present in the environment and is less hazardous than other isotopes. The amount of tritium in the wastewater mixtures is anticipated to be well below the World Health Organization standards for drinking water quality – 1500 becquerels per liter versus the WHO limit of 10,000 becquerels per liter, levels comparable to those in water released from normally operating nuclear power plants in China, the United Kingdom, and Canada.

The Chinese ban on Japanese seafood imports has political backdrop and economic consequences. Hong Kong, the financial center of Asia, and Macau, the casino center, both under Chinese rule, have banned imports from ten Japanese regions. However, Japan's total export is dominated by 100 trillion-yen worth of automobiles and machinery, so the seafood export prohibition is negligible. From China's perspective, they import seafood mainly from Russia and India. Therefore, a ban on the import of seafood is more of a political than an environmental decision. China, North Korea, and Russia have immediately lashed out at Japan's decision to release contaminated water due to its close military ties with South Korea and the United States. North Korea asserted that Japan bribed the United Nations to make such a selfish decision. The South Korean government has welcomed the IAEA's decision regarding the disposal of Fukushima's contaminated water, but their citizens have been vocal in their opposition. They broke into the Japanese embassy while carrying a banner that read, "The sea is not Japan's trash-bin." South Korea's government has a policy against pollution in sea water, but they are supportive of Japan's decision. Human rights activists and the opposition party in South Korea have broken the silence. The concern of Pacific islanders is that no one can prevent the devastation the disposal can cause to human lives, which will have long-term effects on their fishing businesses and lives. Because the hazards associated with Tritium were tested on mice and rats, which led to cancer and infertility, but the effects on human lives are not yet known. Kenneth Buesseler is a prominent scientist at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and a marine radiochemist. Because the water is in direct contact with the molten coil, according to Buesseler, it is exposed to more radiation than cooling water in typically functioning nuclear reactors.

Therefore, the water will need to be treated multiple times to meet Japan's promised health standards. Experts are of the opinion that Japan should not opt for the cheapest and most politically viable options, but should instead retain the water and wait for new technologies to purify it. Japan must remember its international responsibility to prevent transboundary environmental damage. Inadequate radiological and ecological impact assessments can cause severe damage to the ocean floor and marine life, including the marine food chain.

From Awareness to Action: Indonesia Joins the ESG Movement in Rising Climate Concerns

Kazi Israt Jahan



Photo Source: [sijori.id](https://www.sijori.id)

Worldwide growing climate concern has been driving industries worldwide to act on reducing climate impacts through concerned financial institutions. Institutions have been adopting Environmental and Social Governance (ESG) Policies on voluntary initiative in the current climate movement. National and International ESG Policies are evolving fast around the world and turning into mandatory from voluntary action.

Indonesia has recently joined the club by making ESG disclosure mandatory through the Financial Services Authority (OJK) on sustainable finance on July 31, 2023. It's a great start in making a shift towards greener investment projects. According to Indonesia's Sustainable Finance Roadmap launched by OJK in conjunction with the Ministry of Environment and Forestry in 2015, the largest eight banks of Indonesia, representing over 50 percent of the national banking capital assets, are required to integrate ESG criteria into their risk management practices.

In several countries, mandatory Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) reporting is standard practice, despite having significant variation between industries and regions. At present, 29 countries and territories maintain some degree of mandatory ESG disclosure regulation.

Initially, the term Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) was popularized by "Who Cares Wins," a report first published in 2004 by a group of 18 banks and investment firms that was organized by the United Nations. It is a framework used as a tool to evaluate an organization's operations and performance on a range of ethical and environmentally friendly concerns. The goal of an ESG program is to ensure accountability and the implementation of systems and processes to manage a company's impact, such as its carbon footprint and how it treats employees, suppliers, and other stakeholders.

With this mandatory disclosure of ESG reporting, companies are expected or required to comply with national ESG reporting standards or to provide detailed, considered reasons for why they haven't. They are held accountable for any injustice to the workers or the environment by the financial institutions and evaluated based on that for getting finance or investment. Investors use ESG investing to evaluate companies based on their corporate policies and encourage them to act responsibly.

Worldwide, growing numbers of responsible consumers who are concerned about the carbon footprints of the companies from which they consume products or services are compelling the companies to perform as per their expectations. People are more and more looking for ways to recycle, reduce waste, and make greener product choices to reward companies that act responsibly towards the environment.

Individual and institutional investors that take ESG issues into account want to utilize their funds to support businesses that share their own beliefs about social responsibility and environmental sustainability.

Out of the numbered countries that made ESG disclosure mandatory, Indonesia still has a long way to go. Indonesia's banks are yet to be ready to fully take account of ESG in their internal procedures and management systems. As the saying goes, better late than never, we can expect Indonesia to be able to fully implement all the strategies in the near future.

Niger: A Glimmer of Democracy

Mohammad Nihad Nowsher



The 2021 elections in Niger, which have been accorded the recognition of being the nation's first peaceful transition of power since independence, saw about 8 million Nigeriens casting their votes. Preceding the said elections, a former prime minister's candidacy was declared invalid, Niger's borders were deemed to be insecure and political dialogue within the nation had come to a standstill. Two years down the line, Niger's military junta, after deposing President Bazoum, has announced itself as the protector of Niger's national interests versus terrorism and major Western powers. Following this, the junta did not hesitate to ignore the ultimatum of ECOWAS (an intergovernmental organization consisting of 15 West African states), which on the back of the alarming events, called for President Bazoum to be reinstated by August 6th. The junta's defiant holdout against negotiation attempts by the Africa Union (UN), European Union (EU), and UN has taken place simultaneously along with a pro-Russian movement within the nation, gaining pace.

Following the coup, President Bazoum has chosen to highlight the economic advances Niger has made under his regime and gone public with his concerns about attracting foreign aid. Significantly, foreign aid constitutes about 50 percent of Niger's national budget. Amidst the chaos, economic matters have been of interest to ECOWAS, an organization that has in the past intervened in a number of political standoffs taking place within the continent (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mali, Gambia). Mirroring the junta's stance, Mali and Burkina Faso, Niger's neighbors, have come forward to support the coup. The movement has seemingly struck a chord with common Nigeriens,

many of whom are advocating for the removal of foreign troops from Niger and demanding a more level-playing field for the former French colony. At present, troops from the US, France, and Germany are stationed in Niger, while two air bases (where personnel from EU member states are also accommodated) are operated by the US in the politically volatile nation. For the purpose of maintaining military assistance legitimized by US legislation and fighting terrorism in the region, the Biden administration has not yet announced any finalized strategies in response to the coup. The US has, over the past decade, allocated about half a billion dollars to Niger in military assistance. Pivotal to ongoing negotiations, pro-junta conspirator Brig. Gen. Moussa Salaou Barmou (who has been on the radar of the US military for the past three decades) has emerged as an important link between the coup plotters and top-ranking US officials.

The Nigerien junta is up against frozen assets and closed borders with ECOWAS, in addition, to support from the EU being curbed, where more than \$500 million and military support are at stake. In recent times, Mali has become a base of sorts for the Russian Wagner Group, which has as it seems has found a place in Niger's national mood and the junta's nationalistic perspective. President Bazoum, however, has warned of the aforementioned organization occupying an authoritative space at the heart of Africa, the Sahel region, and two of Niger's neighbors. Following the coup, Gen. Abdourahamane Tchiani, the self-declared head of the new administration, oversaw the abolishment of defense agreements with France, allowing onlookers to speculate that an understanding with the Wagner Group (and Russia) had already been established. As things stand, Nigeriens recognize Russia's moral authority over the West, and their anti-France convictions are being given impetus by internal pro-Russian political movements. The overwhelming view in Niger is that the Wagner Group has effectively combatted terrorism in neighboring Mali and that the organization has maintained stable relations with the Malian junta. Common Nigeriens are wary of a possible military invasion orchestrated by ECOWAS and, given the circumstances, would most likely welcome Russian intervention.

It remains to be seen how (and if) stakeholders interact, communicate, and negotiate a common ground where what is considered 'state sustained' in Niger is universally recognized.