

## Surks just beyond the national limit luring a rich catch with lights

BY JUAN JOSE LAGORIO  
REUTERS NEWS AGENCY

**A**TRELEW, Argentina  
S DARKNESS FALLS in southern Argentina, a ghostly apparition of twinkling lights that some have nicknamed "the floating city" forms on the black ocean surface far out at sea.

The unexpected brilliance emerging from the Atlantic — invisible from the shore but striking to approaching fishermen — is not reflected starlight. It is a nightly siren's call from unwelcome visitors that Argentine fishermen say is threatening their livelihoods.

The floating city is a cluster of some 300 ships from Asia and Europe that gather each night 201 nautical miles (370 kilometres) off the coast, where Argentina's exclusive fishing rights end, switching on powerful lamps on their decks and scooping up prized squid.

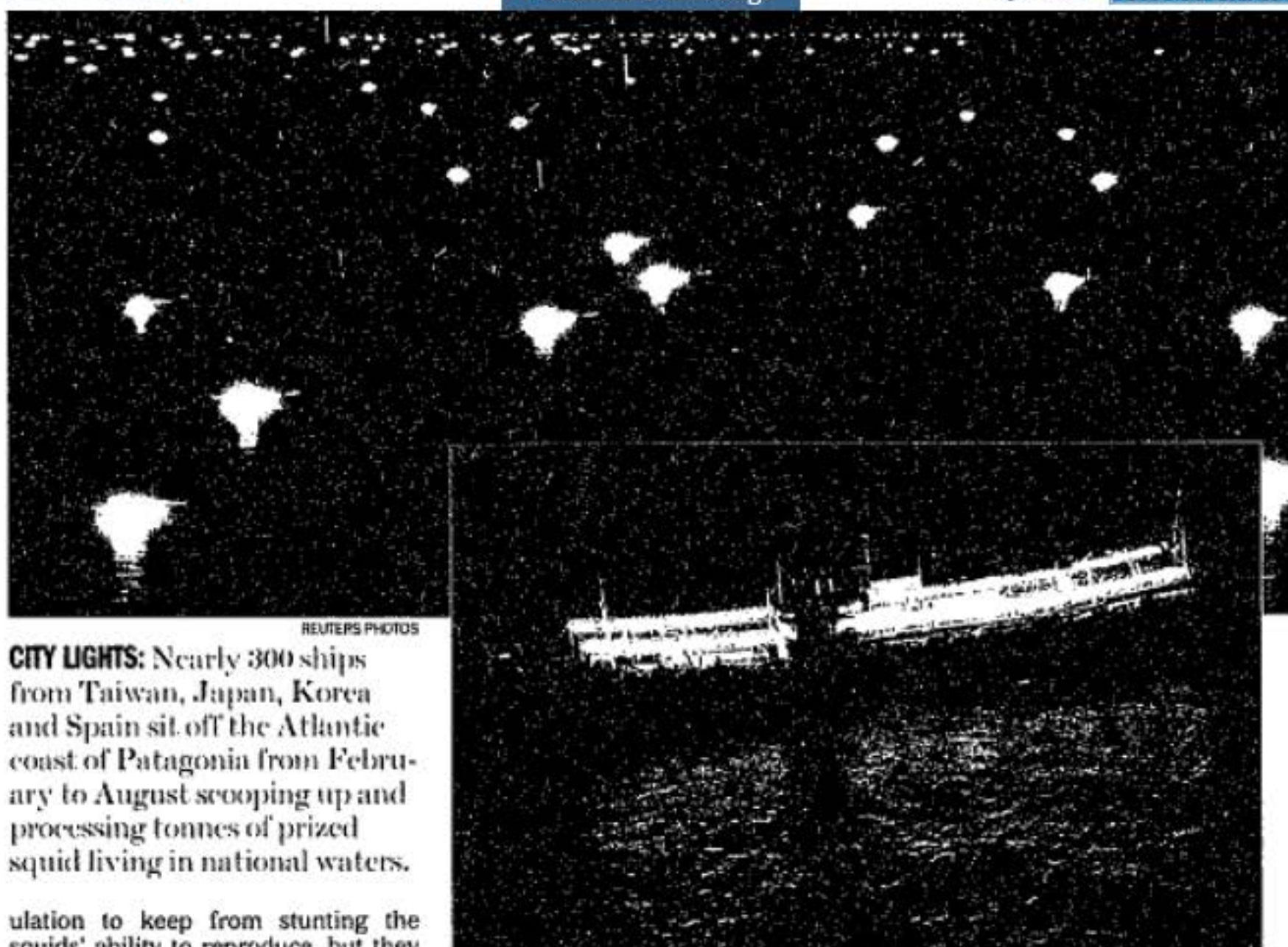
The fleet of Taiwanese, Japanese, Korean and Spanish ships hovering at the brink of Argentine territory does not violate international maritime treaties. But Argentina says it is being cheated out of thousands of tonnes of squid living in its national waters that are lured away by the lights.

"It's like when someone lights a lamp that attracts mosquitoes," says Horacio Rieznik of Argentina's agriculture department, lamenting the new maritime outpost that covers nearly 200 square kilometres, roughly the size of the country's capital, Buenos Aires.

"These ships attract squid from Argentine waters and that damages us because they make off with our harvest and alter the ecological balance," Rieznik says.

Some 350,000 tonnes of squid are brought in from Argentine waters annually, yielding \$300 million a year or 25 per cent of total profits from Argentina's fishing industry. But Argentina is pushing for its exclusive fishing limits to be extended an additional 100 nautical miles (180 kilometres) to a total of 300 nautical miles, which would bring its harvest to 800,000 tonnes a year.

Argentines try to limit annual harvests to 60 per cent of the species' pop-



**CITY LIGHTS:** Nearly 300 ships from Taiwan, Japan, Korea and Spain sit off the Atlantic coast of Patagonia from February to August scooping up and processing tonnes of prized squid living in national waters.

ulation to keep from stunting the squids' ability to reproduce, but they cannot regulate fishing outside their maritime limits.

"There isn't a real risk of extinction owing to the squid's short life cycle, but if this continues it could provoke damaging effects for Argentina," Rieznik says.

But environmentalists charge the squid are just as threatened by Argentine overfishing as by the foreigners and point to declining harvests as evidence of the ecological threat to other forms of marine life as well.

They say, for example, that a 1999 hake harvest of 312,000 tonnes — 40 per cent higher than the ceiling fixed by the Argentine Fish Institute — edged the fish toward extinction and forced Argentina to tighten fishing quotas.

And the losses are not limited to the popular hake. Since 1997, total marine harvests have fallen 30 per cent. "These situations are a result of the government's irresponsible policy," says a Greenpeace spokesperson.

As the sun sets on the fleet of squid ships, far off the coast of the Patagonian city of Trelew and 1,200 kilo-

metres south of Buenos Aires, crews gear up for another night of intense fishing.

Crew members see little dry land during the squid season, which runs from February to August, as they seek to maximize harvests. A highly organized process among the fleet guarantees high yields from start to finish. There are even boats on hand to process squid and others to take harvests to port for sale.

Just beyond the bustling industrial fleet, the Argentine navy keeps a sharp eye on the foreign ships to ensure none enters Argentina's maritime territory. Four boats were detained for illegally fishing in Argentine waters last year but officials say the number of undetected ships is much higher.

"It's difficult because they're very careful," says navy official Jose Maria de Bordeci. "Sometimes we get them when they get too far inside (Argentine territory) and can't get out. What we do is try to surprise them." Taiwan's government denies its ships vio-

late any law. "As members of the international community we respect international laws," says a Taiwanese diplomat in Argentina who requested anonymity. "We haven't received any complaints about this."

Other countries whose ships are part of the floating city off Argentina had no comment.

Because the foreign ships are not legally prohibited from fishing at the limit of Argentina's territory, Buenos Aires has little room to manoeuvre. But officials say the government plans to submit a complaint to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization demanding that fishing codes of etiquette be respected and foreign ships not fish right at Argentine maritime borders.

Such conduct regulations are not obligatory and the only concrete measure Argentina can take is to patrol the area carefully and hope that, when foreign ships dismantle the floating city to steam home at the end of the season, they do not make off with the bulk of the squid harvest.

## A hothouse plan to help city's hungry

Toronto is brimming with food. People are not going hungry because there is a lack of food. They're hungry because they're poor.

Food banks and emergency shelters are strained to breaking points, and the homeless are proliferating, because the poverty rate in the city has more than doubled in the past 10 years. And now, says the National Council on Welfare, those who are the poorest of the poor are growing in numbers at an alarming rate.

The fact is that Toronto, given its poverty and hunger, is not a sustainable community.

In hopes of dealing with this situation, the city's Food and Hunger Action Committee has just published an action plan containing 38 recommendations. "Prevention," it says, "makes better sense than disaster relief." It adds that hunger and chronic undernourishment are best addressed by advocating policies that would "ensure food security in Toronto."

The committee was established by city council 14 months ago. Its plan offers a two-pronged approach. It suggests a variety of ways to increase the amount of money poor families have available for food, and it has a number of suggestions for lowering the cost of food for the poor.

I find the report at its most innovative in its recommendations for lowering food costs.

For instance, it says community gardens could operate in greenhouses over the winter and reduce heating costs by composting garbage — a low-tech, low-cost approach.

Compost creates heat as it decomposes and gives off carbon dioxide, which can be used to speed the growth of plants. And it diverts garbage from landfills, says FoodShare, the city agency dedicated to reducing hunger in Toronto.

"Toronto has 44 greenhouses in public and private ownership," the action committee report says. "Some are used for only part of the year. Toronto could, in partnership with greenhouse managers, make greenhouse space available in which community groups could start growing food."

It also notes that Toronto has about 150 hectares of vacant land formerly used by industry, "where (commercial) greenhouses could go."

The report cites Buffalo as an example of what can be done. In Buffalo, Village Farms, Inc. is using hydroponics to grow vegetables in a 7.3-hectare greenhouse on the site of the former Republic Steel Co. . . . The greenhouse operation has created 100 full-time and 35 part-time jobs. Many of the jobs have been filled by former welfare recipients who live in downtown Buffalo. Heat from a nearby electricity generating station keeps the greenhouse warm.

## Germany gets heat over endangered hamsters

**BRUSSELS (AP)** — The European Commission is taking legal action against the German government for allegedly failing to protect endangered hamsters, the organization announced recently.

Germany infringed on European environmental laws by allowing intensive agriculture and industrial construction in an area near the Dutch border that is home to the threatened species *Cricetus cricetus*, the commission says.

Popularly known as the European hamster or black-bellied hamster, *Cri-*

*cetus cricetus* is the largest of the hamster species and can grow up to 12.6 centimetres long. It risks extinction in its natural habitats in Germany, the Netherlands and northeast France, according to a hamster-enthusiast Web site.

The commission says it sent Germany a "reasoned opinion" on the issue, a legal step that could lead to the German government being hauled before the European Union's high court if it fails to provide a satisfactory explanation.

The European Court of Justice

could impose fines if it finds that the EU's habitats directive, which protects the breeding sites and resting place of rare species, is infringed.

The commission says the Horbacher Boerde area near the city of Aachen, where industrial development is planned, was "one of the three most important sites for the species" in northwest Germany.

German reports have cast doubt upon the presence of hamsters there, but the EU dismissed that.

"The commission is sure there are hamsters," says Annika Oestergren,

spokeswoman for EU Environment Commissioner Margot Wallstrom.


The EU commission has called *Cricetus cricetus* "an endangered hamster" that is "suffering a recent severe decline."

A 1999 Council of Europe recommendation refers to it as "endangered and vulnerable," and the Bern international convention on endangered wildlife lists it as needing to be "strictly protected."


The commission says it had expressed concerns to Dutch authorities about the fate of hamsters there.



## Foot-and-Mouth Update


 As the foot-and-mouth crisis in Europe entered its third week, the European Union announced it would ban all livestock markets for at least one week in an effort to contain the outbreak. The officials also ordered that all British vehicles entering other countries be disinfected. The group's veterinary panel extended the ban on exports of livestock, meat and milk products from Britain, where the outbreak of the wildly contagious disease originated. David Stuart of Oxford University said the foot-and-mouth virus was one of the most infectious found in any animal. He said, "If the virus infects a cell, within a couple of hours that cell can be changed from a normal one to something that bursts open, releasing about 100,000 virus particles." Nearly 45,000 grazing animals have already been burned in an effort to stop the spread of the disease, which only affects cloven-hoofed animals.

## Congo Eruption


 Tens of thousands of people in eastern Congo fled from the slopes of Nyamuragira volcano as it began its worst eruption since 1982. Yo Winder, head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, reported that lava was gushing down the flanks of the volcano as gas spewed from its craters. Winder said, "More dangerous than the lava is the poisonous gas and the ash. The gas and ash are threatening the drinking water

reserves." The 3,055-metre-high volcano is located 23 km north of Goma. It is part of a chain of volcanoes that dot the mountainous region of eastern Congo.

## High Andean Threat


 At least 400 natives who live on Peru's famed floating islands in Lake Titicaca are threatened with sinking if incessant rains continue to inundate their unique structures. The Uru, descendants of the ancient Incas, regard the lake as sacred. They make their homes on islands constructed of dried reed-like totora plants. Three of the 12 islands are at risk of sinking as they become more waterlogged by increasing regional storms.

## Southern Cyclones

 Tropical cyclone Paula brought high winds and torrential rains to the South Pacific island nation of Vanuatu before losing force southwest of Fiji. The storm may have been responsible for the death of a 19-year-old youth on the island of Santo who disappeared while trying to move his canoe to safety during the height of the storm.

Tropical storm Rita formed briefly over the remote waters of the central South Pacific.


## Earthquakes

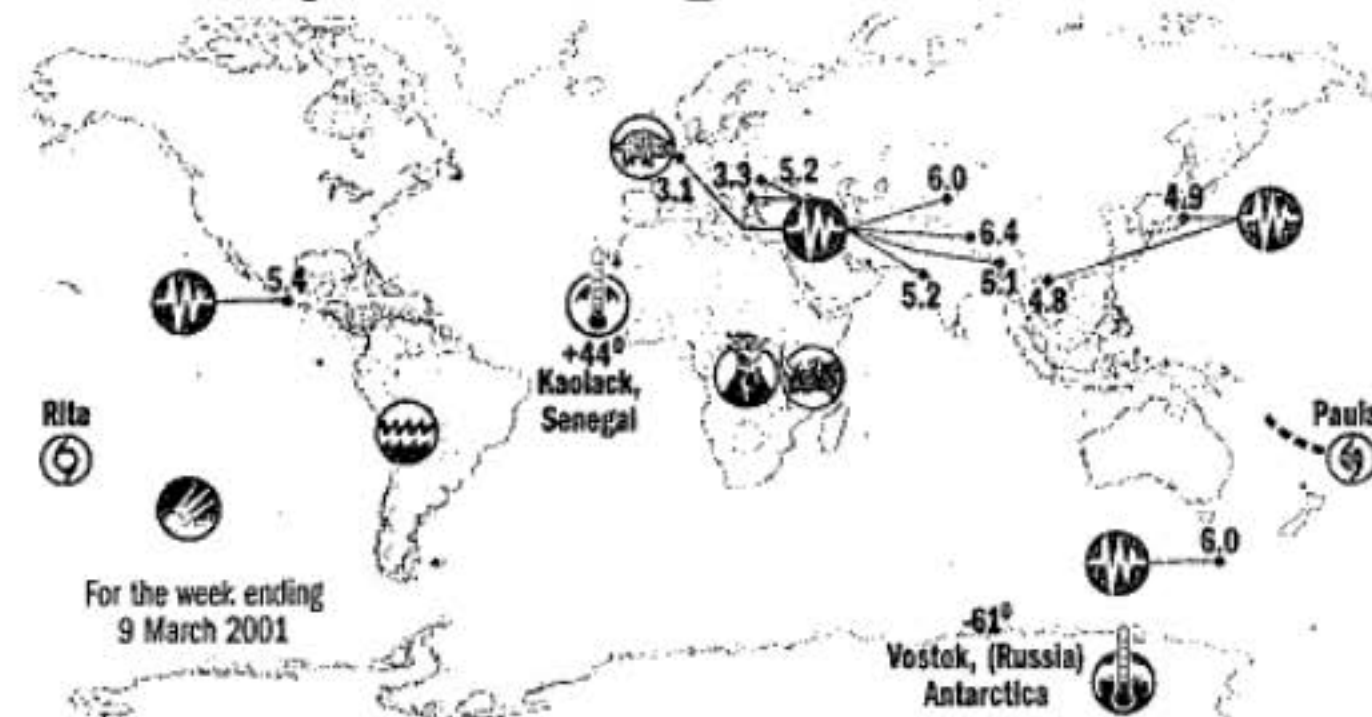
 Mexico's Pacific coast resort of Acapulco was rattled by a swarm of strong earthquakes that shook a wide

area of the central part of the country. No significant damage was reported.

Earth movements were also felt in eastern Japan, northwestern Vietnam, southwestern Tibet, Kyrgyzstan, north-eastern India, the western India after-shock zone, eastern Romania, southern Bulgaria, the southern Netherlands and Australia's remote Macquarie Island.


## Mystery Killer

 Hundreds of animals in Tanzania's world-famous Ngorongoro Crater have died of a puzzling disease during the past 10 months. Among the dead are seven of the country's remaining 17 black rhinos. Some animal conservationists fear that the disease could be a direct result of the severe drought that hit the northern part of Tanzania last



year, causing widespread food shortages in communities surrounding the national parks. Others theorize that the deaths may be caused by babesiosis, also known as redwater fever. The disease is brought on by the *Babesia microti* parasite and is transmitted through the bites of infected ticks. Babesiosis causes a form of anemia and subsequent breathing problems owing to lack of sufficient red blood cells.

## Mutant Space Fungi

 Space scientist Yuri Karash warned reporters that mutant space fungi clinging to the surfaces of the space station Mir could survive its planned descent to Earth later this month. Karash, who is an expert on the Russian space program, said there was a possibility that the micro-organisms, which have been mutating in isolation on the aging space craft for the past 15 years, could pose a threat if they make it through the atmosphere. Western researchers have frequently voiced concerns about micro-organisms being brought back to Earth following the discoveries of a Russian microbiologist who found many aggressive forms of fungi aboard Mir. The space station's fiery descent would put it into a watery grave somewhere between New Zealand and Chile, and at least 40 tonnes of debris are expected to make it to Earth.

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E-mail: mail@earthweek.com

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The result is fresher produce than what could be transported from California or Mexico, elimination of pollutants from long-distance trucking, especially greenhouse gas emissions, creation of local jobs, food prices that are competitive or lower than those for trucked-in food and the transformation of derelict lands.

If Toronto ever gets around to building methane digesters to dispose of its organic garbage, it could do the same — use the methane as fuel to power an electricity generating station, and channel some of the heat produced into greenhouses.

Equally innovative is a suggestion for bulk buying of food to achieve volume discounts. "A random survey of 30 Toronto agencies and community groups indicated a high level of interest in being part (of bulk-buying)," the report says.

There even is an existing bulk-buying organization that could be used, namely the provincially sponsored Shared Services Bureau. It collectively buys for correctional institutions, the Ontario Fire College, and the Ontario Police College. The report says bureau staff are keenly interested in serving the city.

Innovative ideas, however, are not enough. There needs to be political will, exercised at all three levels of government. Surely, if the three governments can collaborate on a sporting spectacle — the Olympic bid — they can collaborate in grappling with this very good report.

Cameron Smith is an author and environmentalist living in Lansdowne, Ont.