



DrumBeat: December 13, 2007

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Topic: [Alternative energy](#)

[Traffic clears in Italy as truckers end crippling strike, supplies slowly resume](#)

Italian highway traffic was back to normal Thursday after truckers removed blockades and ended a three-day strike that brought the country to a standstill and caused shortages of gasoline and food.

Unions called off the protest after reaching a deal late Wednesday with the government and truck drivers removed the vehicles they had lined up at tollbooths and border points to protest high gasoline prices, long working hours and foreign competition.

[Japan Nuclear Energy Drive Compromised by Conflicts of Interest](#)

On March 25, Hokuriku Electric Power Co.'s nuclear generating station in Shika, Japan, was rocked by an earthquake that wasn't supposed to happen.

Nine years earlier, Yoshihiro Kinugasa, the leading seismologist on Japan's nuclear licensing panel, signed off on a pre-construction study of the site. The report identified three fault lines, each less than 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) long, or just under the length regulators deemed threatening.

In 2005, Kinugasa switched roles and published a study with Hokuriku Electric engineers that rebutted neighbors' claims the plant was unsafe. After the quake, government scientists found the fissures were in fact a single fault of 18 kilometers that could produce more shaking than the plant was built to withstand.

[Nobel scientist in biofuel warning](#)

A Nobel Prize-winning scientist has warned that switching from fossil fuels to biofuels could do the planet more harm than good.

Prof Paul Crutzen calculated the global warming effects of the fertiliser needed to grow energy crops like biodiesel and bioethanol were much worse than has been estimated.

[Dark days ahead for energy-strapped South Africa](#)

Constant power cuts are darkening the mood among South Africans, with President Thabo Mbeki admitting that government was at fault for ignoring growing energy needs.

Africa's largest economy is buckling under energy-pressures after failing to heed pleas by state power utility Eskom to invest more in electricity generation to keep up with the country's growth.

[China and India Exploit Icy Energy Reserves](#)

China and India have reported massive finds of frozen methane gas off their coasts, which they hope will satisfy their energy needs. But environmentalists fear that tapping these resources could have adverse effects on the world climate.

[Nepal to pay 42 million dollars dues to IOC](#)

Nepal government has decided to pay 42 million dollars (2.7 million Nepalese rupees) to Indian Oil Corporation to ease supply of petroleum products following pressure from petrol dealers and consumers to regularise supply of oil products.

[Senate Republicans block energy bill](#)

Senate Republicans blocked a broad energy bill Thursday because it included billions of dollars in new taxes on the biggest oil companies.

Democratic leaders fell one vote short, 59-40, in getting the 60 votes needed to overcome a GOP filibuster. Democrats said they would strip the taxes from the legislation to move the bill forward.

[South Africa: Chamber of Mines says power outlook is 'bleak'](#)

Load shedding and rolling blackouts - which Eskom said could last for the next five to eight years - can, and probably already are, affecting South Africa's mining industry operations.

Chamber of Mines assistant adviser techno economics Dick Kruger said on Wednesday that "the mines are getting edgy".

[Shrinking the US Dollar from the Inside-Out](#)

On December 8, Chinese and French news services reported that Iran had stopped billing its oil exports in dollars.

...The assault is symbolic, because the dollar is not the reserve currency due to oil exports being billed in dollars. It's the other way around. Oil exports are billed in dollars, because the dollar is the reserve currency.

[Norway oil spill stirs fears for Arctic](#)

The accident has stirred debate about the risks of opening up new areas of Norwegian waters for oil and gas exploration, especially in the Arctic, where spills would have a bigger impact.

[Uganda, Congo in Talks to Revive 1990 Joint Oil Pact](#)

Congolese and Ugandan ministers are meeting in Kampala Wednesday to discuss ways in which the two countries can enhance economic cooperation and revive the 1990 joint oil exploration pact following the recent discovery of commercial oil reserves in the Lake Albert valley, Uganda's permanent secretary at the ministry of foreign affairs told Dow Jones Newswires Wednesday.

[New Zealand: Sustainable transport drives strategy update](#)

The Government has agreed to halve per capita domestic greenhouse gas transport emissions.

"... all westernised countries are facing the same challenges ... we need to keep the economy moving while thinking about peak oil and also thinking about greenhouse gases," Mr Allard said. The targets in the update have been set for 2040.

They included lifting rail's share of domestic freight from about 18 percent to 25 percent, double coastal shipping's share of inter-regional freight to about 30 percent, reducing premature deaths and serious illnesses caused by air pollution, and at least double the overall public transport mode share to 7 percent of all passenger trips.

[Does green make a difference?](#)

Almost everyone applauds when companies adapt green practices. But will those practices make a meaningful difference to the environment?

[No Solution to Drought in Sight: Atlanta Water Czar](#)

Tensions were high as business and civic leaders gathered for the Georgia Water Solutions Forum at the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, as reported by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Officials face hard choices and no clear solutions to the serious drought that is plaguing the Southeast.

[Open a new highway – on the sea](#)

Coastal shipping has the potential to strengthen the resilience of America's transportation system – an important national security objective. It can also provide substantial environmental benefits by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The European Union, which moves 40 percent of its internal freight by sea, provides an example of how much America stands to gain.

[China 'ups fuel output to ensure supply'](#)

China has reiterated that it is boosting fuel production to meet strong domestic demand and cushion the blow of higher prices on its economy.

"China attaches great importance to the impact of high oil prices on economic growth and is trying to increase production of oil products to guarantee market supply," Zhang Xiaoqiang, deputy head of National Development and Reform Commission, told reporters.

[China refinery runs rise at slowest pace in 15 months](#)

China's refinery runs rose 3.8 percent in November, their weakest annual rise in 15 months, data showed on Thursday, a possible sign that mainstream refiners are failing to build new capacity fast enough to meet demand.

Following a months-long fuel crisis that prompted a 10 percent increase in motor fuel prices last month and heavy pressure from Beijing for state-owned refiners to step up production, output by those plants showed only a 4 percent rise versus October, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics.

[Papua New Guinea: Supply distribution stalled](#)

SHORTAGE of Jet A1 fuel for aircrafts including helicopters in the flood-devastated Oro province has reportedly hampered the distribution and transportation of relief supplies and teams to affected areas.

[Paraffin shortage hits Malawi](#)

One of the buyers who refused to be identified in Blantyre said he felt that retailers are hiding the product to make huge returns with the looming fuel price increase.

But Mdeza quashed the idea saying it is a fact that most paraffin pumps are dry.

[Vermont fuel dealer urges Congress to regulate speculators who drive up costs](#)

Vermonters hit with record home heating bills this winter are victims of a growing number of unregulated energy speculators who drive up the price of crude oil, a Vermont home heating oil provider told a congressional panel Wednesday.

Sean Cota, co-owner and president of Cota & Cota Inc. of Bellows Falls, urged members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee to pass legislation to close a loophole that exempts energy markets from government regulation to prevent price manipulation.

[Alaska: Study raises fear of regional energy shortage](#)

Companies exploring for oil in Cook Inlet back in the 1960s instead discovered large quantities of natural gas. And much of Southcentral's economy has developed around this cheap, abundant and local energy source.

Those days are coming to end. Soon, Southcentral will begin using more gas than is produced in Cook Inlet. It could occur in as little as eight years, well before natural gas from the North Slope comes online.

[No new coal](#)

The battle lines have been drawn. On the horizon lies a much warmer world with submerged island nations, greater storm intensities, tragically lower crop yields in Africa, more floods and droughts, and heightened competition for clean water. With this future and the large role played by coal combustion in climate change, should we allow any new coal-fired power plants to be constructed?

[Could coal solve energy crisis?](#)

COAL could once more be king in North East England, according to a council boss.

Energy experts are looking at new ways of using coal reserves to power the nation.

[2 states, 1 big coal windfall](#)

Illinois and Texas have been trying to one-up each other for more than a century, and now, the rivalry has entered a new phase with the battle for a cutting-edge power plant that is one of the richest and most promising research plums of the energy crisis.

[US House Passes Burma Sanctions Bill That Targets Chevron](#)

The House unanimously passed legislation yesterday that pressures U.S. oil major Chevron Corp. to abandon its investments in Myanmar, formerly Burma, where military rulers have violently cracked down on pro-democracy protests.

[Beyond the point of no return](#)

We have failed to meet nature's deadline. In the next few years, this world will experience progressively more ominous and destabilizing changes. These will happen either incrementally -- or in sudden, abrupt jumps.

Under either scenario, it seems inevitable that we will soon be confronted by water shortages, crop failures, increasing damages from extreme weather events, collapsing infrastructures, and, potentially, breakdowns in the democratic process itself.

[Monbiot: This crisis demands a reappraisal of who we are and what progress means](#)

When you warn people about the dangers of climate change, they call you a saint. When you explain what needs to be done to stop it, they call you a communist. Let me show you why.

[StatoilHydro Tracks Oil Slick in the North Sea](#)

The oil slick from the Statfjord oil spill on Dec. 12 is moving toward the northeast. According to StatoilHydro's calculations, it has reached the Snorre field in the North Sea.

Two vessels have been observing the oil slick during the night. The observations confirm that the slick is moving toward the northeast. An airplane from the Norwegian Coastal Administration will pass over the area, some 20 kilometers northeast of the Statfjord field, in the morning of Dec. 13.

[Steep heating costs hit neediest](#)

Soaring fuel prices are creating a crisis among low-income people and senior citizens who can't afford to heat their homes, say local agencies that distribute federal heating subsidies.

"This is a scary, scary winter. I don't know what folks are going to do," says Debbie Hambly of Rhode Island's East Bay Community Action Program. The average one-time, \$325 grant there buys 100 gallons of heating oil — enough for about two weeks, she says.

[Is Coal Going to be the New Oil?](#)

Peak oil, yes; but 'peak coal'? India's Tata Power recently acquired 30% stakes in Indonesia's two largest coal mines, securing 20 million tons of coal to fuel its 750 kilowatt project on India's west coast. This is a shrewd and opportune move. There's a sustained and tightening squeeze on global supplies of the 'thermal' coal needed to power the world's coal-fired power stations, just as Asia (except Japan) embarks on a massive expansion of planned generating capacity based on coal, despite rising concerns about carbon pollution. The technology that needs to be deployed to separate and store the pollutants from coal burning is still at least five years away...

[Brazil's offshore oil bonanza may be even bigger](#)

Scare-mongers would have us believe that "peak oil" production has been realized, and that we face a future of increasing scarcity and economic chaos. But when governmental restrictions are loosened, and the human mind is unleashed and driven by the potential for profit, experience suggests that previously ignored, missed, or misunderstood potential will be realized. Doom-sayers have been with us throughout recorded history. Sometimes they have been vindicated, but mostly they have been wrong.

[North Korea: The lack of electricity due to low precipitation](#)

With North Korea entering a period of low-precipitation winter season (dry season), it seems that the electricity situation is worsening. A source from the North Hamkyung Province said recently, "We hardly see electricity."

The source commented in a phone conversation on the 10th that people live having no idea of what is going on in the outside, "There is no electricity in the evening, so we cannot even watch Chosun Central TV. Moreover, it takes 10 days for the Rodung Shinmun to arrive."

Rail operations have been irregular due to the power shortage, which accounts for the problems in newspaper delivery. North Korean rail runs on electricity.

[IATA slashes profits outlook for airlines as fuel price and credit crisis hit](#)

The airline industry has cut its forecast for profits next year by a third as soaring fuel costs and the credit crunch begin to take their toll.

[Oil investments at its best](#)

With oil prices still near all-time highs, the Peak Oil theorists are back out in force, screaming, "The world is running out of oil! The world is running out of oil!"

It's not. However, the world is running out of easy-to-find, easy-to-recover oil. And those companies that can keep costs low and help oil exploration companies increase their odds of hitting crude when they drill are highly valuable partners.

[Energy consultant points to opportunities in green efforts](#)

A growing acceptance of human-induced climate change and the link between energy and national security has pushed conservation into the mainstream, industry consultant Joseph Stanislaw says, giving consumers more power than ever before.

[Cities cultivate 2 types of green](#)

Two years ago, Wells made an improbable conversion from convict to environmentalist. He was just out of prison after serving 10 years for armed robbery and couldn't find a job that would pay enough to make the rent.

Then he found Sustainable South Bronx, and he found a calling.

Since 2003, the environmental group has trained 70 former drug addicts, welfare recipients and convicts for jobs in landscaping, ecological restoration, green roof installation and hazardous waste cleanup.

[Nuclear Power's "Green" Credentials Under Fire](#)

Nuclear power's claim to be the answer to global warming is being questioned by reports suggesting mining and processing of uranium is carbon intensive.

While nuclear power produces only one 50th of the carbon produced by many fossil fuels, its carbon footprint is rising, making wind power and other renewable energies increasingly attractive, according to environmental groups and some official reports.

[California wins right to regulate vehicles' emissions](#)

Handing a major defeat to the auto industry, a federal judge ruled Wednesday that California can regulate greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles.

[If It's Fresh and Local, Is It Always Greener?](#)

While the research is not yet complete, Tom Tomich, director of the University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, said the fact that something is local doesn't necessarily mean that it is better, environmentally speaking.

The distance that food travels from farm to plate is certainly important, he says, but so is how food is packaged, how it is grown, how it is processed and how it is transported to market.

[Sundance Channel Acquires Eleven Documentaries to Premiere As Part Of The Green](#)

Crude Impact - Directed by James Jandak Wood. This award-winning film details the many ways that oil has shaped the world by enabling humankind to dominate virtually every other species living on the planet. The film spans over 150 years as it considers the past, present and future of human oil usage, exploring topics including the science of Peak Oil; the human and environmental toll exacted by oil dependency; and the role of oil in geopolitics.

Escape from Suburbia - Directed by Gregory Greene. Will the American lifestyle - epitomized by the single family home and two-car garage - remain tenable as we advance into an age of declining oil supplies and rising prices? Escape from Suburbia considers the possibilities as it examines the burgeoning grass-roots movement to "power down" from energy-intensive habits.

[Japan steps up its biofuel drive](#)

Fueled by concerns over surging oil prices and accelerating global warming, resource-poor Japan is revving up its drive to promote biofuels. Most publicly, tax changes aimed at encouraging motorists to use bio-gasoline are expected in a few months after the world's second-largest economy and third-largest oil consumer started to sell bio-gasoline at a limited number of gas stations earlier this year on a trial basis.

[A Young Tinkerer Builds a Windmill, Electrifying a Nation](#)

MASITALA, Malawi -- On a continent woefully short of electricity, 20-year-old William

Kamkwamba has a dream: to power up his country one windmill at a time.

So far, he has built three windmills in his yard here, using blue-gum trees and bicycle parts. His tallest, at 39 feet, towers over this windswept village, clattering away as it powers his family's few electrical appliances: 10 six-watt light bulbs, a TV set and a radio. The machine draws in visitors from miles around.

[Airborne Wind Turbines](#)

Traditional wind turbines can be unreliable sources of energy because, well, the wind blows where it will. Not the case 1,000 feet up. "At a thousand feet, there is steady wind anywhere in the world," says Mac Brown, chief operating officer of Ottawa-based Magenn Power.

To take advantage of this constant breeze, Brown has developed a lighter-than-air wind turbine capable of powering a rural village. "Picture a spinning Goodyear blimp," Brown says.

[Senate energy bill calls Bush's bluff on veto](#)

Senate Democrats are calling the White House's bluff on a threatened veto of an energy bill by refusing to take out language that would remove tax breaks for big oil and gas companies.

The Senate's version of the bill, which modifies energy legislation passed last week by the U.S. House of Representatives, is scheduled to be voted on Thursday. It would repeal about \$13 billion in tax breaks for mostly big oil companies such as Exxon Mobil Corp.

[Groups mobilize against floating, liquefied gas terminal](#)

Mere mention of liquefied natural gas is enough to send chills through Staten Islanders who remember the deadly Feb. 10, 1973, explosion inside a 500,000-barrel LNG tank in Bloomfield, which killed 40 workers.

So when ExxonMobil announced Tuesday that it plans to seek regulatory approval for a \$1 billion floating terminal for liquefied natural gas about 20 miles off the Jersey Shore - - roughly 30 miles southeast of the Island -- it didn't take long for local environmental groups to sound the alarm and vow to fight its construction.

[Nigeria energy reforms expected to make it tougher for foreign operators to profit](#)

Nigeria is launching the deepest overhaul of its petroleum industry in decades, a move expected to make it tougher for big operators like Royal Dutch Shell PLC (RDSB.LN) to profit from tapping Africa's biggest oil-producing country.

[Nigeria: Pipeline Fire Claims NNPC Official](#)

For the umpteenth time, another tragic fire erupted yesterday from a vandalized pipeline belonging to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).

The latest incident which took place at Arepo village in Ogun State, claimed the life of a senior management staff of the corporation, Mr. Odigili M.C, while three other senior staff attached to the corporation's Mosimi Depot, Ogun, State, sustained various degrees of burns.

[Sabic hit by construction costs](#)

The increase in construction costs in the Middle East could force firms to cancel petrochemical projects, Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (Sabic) the world's largest chemical maker by market value, reported Reuters. Costs have surged by 50 per cent in the past four years, Sabic chief executive Mohamed Al-Mady said. Building costs are climbing across the oil-exporting Gulf Arab region, driven by increases in global prices for materials such as steel and competition among regional contractors working on \$2.4 trillion worth of projects, which is pushing up wages.

[Europe's cities take the lead on cutting emissions](#)

Woking, England - With solar-powered streetlights and energy-efficient power generators, this town 25 miles southwest of London is at the vanguard of a promising movement accelerating emissions-cutting programs.

From the metropolises of London and Stockholm to hamlets like Güssing in Austria, communities are showing that you don't necessarily need international treaties or global rules to force climate change action.

[Climate change action at what political price?](#)

"ACTION to tackle climate change will not be easy. It will require tough choices. And some of these will come at a political price," Prime Minister Kevin Rudd told the UN conference, perhaps prophetically.

Right now Mr Rudd has a choice in Bali, but so far he has hesitated to make it.

[New Tibetan Ice Cores Missing A-Bomb Blast Markers, Suggests Himalayan Ice Fields haven't grown in 50 years](#)

Scientists believe that the missing signal means that this Tibetan ice field has been shrinking at least since the A-bomb test half a century ago. If true, this could foreshadow a future when the stockpiles of freshwater will dwindle and vanish, seriously affecting the lives of more than 500 million people on the Indian subcontinent.

[Without its insulating ice cap, Arctic surface waters warm to as much as 5 C above average](#)

Record-breaking amounts of ice-free water have deprived the Arctic of more of its natural "sunscreen" than ever in recent summers. The effect is so pronounced that sea surface temperatures rose to 5 C above average in one place this year, a high never before observed, says the oceanographer who has compiled the first-ever look at average sea surface temperatures for the region.

Such superwarming of surface waters can affect how thick ice grows back in the winter, as well as its ability to withstand melting the next summer, according to Michael Steele, an oceanographer with the University of Washington's Applied Physics Laboratory. Indeed, since September, the end of summer in the Arctic, winter freeze-up in some areas is two months later than usual.



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