

DrumBeat: February 2, 2009

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Topic: Miscellaneous

Russia in outer darkness

MOSCOW - In outer space, as everyone knows, the absence of the force of gravity produces the appearance of weightlessness. Everything floats away.

The markets have decided that Russia is now without gravity; its equities are without weight, and at risk of floating away. Late last year, the RTS, the principal stock market index, starting decoupling from the price of the principal Russian export, oil, as the latter started to plummet. The emerging market investment funds, which have also moved with oil and Russia's other exportable commodities, also decoupled from commodity prices and the RTS.

Oil falls 4 percent on more bad economic news

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. – Oil prices tumbled nearly 4 percent Monday in a volatile trading day fraught with more bad economic news, including thousands of job cuts by Macy's department store.

Light, sweet crude for March delivery fell \$1.60 to settle at \$40.08 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange after tumbling at one point to \$39.83.

Oil Industry Wary Of New US Interior Secretary's Policies

WASHINGTON -(Dow Jones)- Despite Interior Secretary Ken Salazar's vow to draft a comprehensive energy policy that includes new domestic oil and gas drilling, the industry is watching with a wary eye.

Salazar hasn't been specific about where he will open new acreage for lease sales. But based on his comments so far, some industry officials fear that new drilling rights under such a plan may be in areas that show little promise compared to other prospects likely to remain off limits.

The officials also say the secretary's pledge to reform the government's royalty program, which collects billions of revenue from the industry for federal coffers, may

discourage even more new projects.

Leak shuts Nautilus gas line

Enbridge's U.S. unit declared force majeure on Sunday due to a leak on its 30-inch, 101-mile Nautilus natural gas pipeline in the US Gulf of Mexico.

Oil company deals thrown into limbo

A crippling dispute between deputies and the government could lead Kuwait to shelve or postpone new oil service contracts to boost output and deals to build one of the Middle East's largest oil refineries.

Petrobras May Consider Oil-Stake Sales to Raise Cash

(Bloomberg) -- Petroleo Brasileiro SA, Brazil's state-controlled oil company, may consider selling stakes in some of its oil fields to pay for expansion if banks fail to provide loans, Chief Financial Officer Almir Barbassa said.

Petrobras may cut spending if cannot fund capex

LONDON (Reuters) - Brazilian oil company Petrobras said it is ready to cut investment plans or raise funds from sources it previously considered unattractive if it has difficulty meeting its cash needs next year.

Iraq crude exports hit 1.89m bpd

Baghdad: Iraq's monthly crude oil exports increased to an average of 1.893 million barrels per day (bpd) in January, boosted by continuing shipments by truck through Jordan, an oil industry official said on Monday.

Petrobras says could buy rigs, contractors

LONDON (Reuters) - Brazilian state-run energy company Petrobras said could buy rigs or the companies that own them, to ensure it had the equipment it needs to advance its drilling programme.

Chief Executive Jose Sergio Gabrielli told reporters and analysts on Monday that the companies which are contracted to supply Petrobras with rigs could face construction and financing problems in the coming years.

Oil isn't over

If Andarko's Gulf oil field comes true, it means higher fuel prices but a much steeper climb for any alternative auto fuel. Could it be the speculation bubble created a false dawn for alternative car fuel? Can even carbon taxes force a change in the cars we drive? Andarko's announcement is certainly bad news for those pushing Canada's tar sands production. Canada is currently the #1 importer of oil to the U.S.

Sarah Palin: The case for drilling in ANWR

I AM DISMAYED THAT LEGISLATION HAS AGAIN BEEN INTRODUCED in Congress to prohibit forever oil and gas development in the most promising unexplored petroleum province in North America -- the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, in Alaska.

Let's not forget: Only six months ago, oil was selling for nearly \$150 per barrel, while Americans were paying \$4 a gallon and more for gasoline. And today, there is potential for prices to rebound as OPEC asserts its market power and as Russia disrupts needed natural gas to Europe for the second time in three years.

Pipeline begins process to enter U.S.

A Canada-to-Texas oil pipeline that, if approved, would eventually work its way through Lamar County on its way to refineries along the Gulf Coast, is in the beginning stages of its application process.

The first stage of the process is getting the right to cross the Canada-U.S. border, and the U.S. State Department has opened the environmental study process and is taking public comments for the next 45 days.

Analyst face-off: Chevron

Is it overvalued or ready to come out on top when a rebound hits? Two analysts, a bull and a bear, give us their take.

Why these strikers may tear down the EU empire

Looks like today the British workers outside the Lindsey oil refinery in Lincolnshire have been twinned with the striking workers at the shipyards at Gdansk in 1980: and for any worker, there could be no greater honour.

Gdansk was the moment when Polish workers stood against the Soviet empire and said there would be no more submission: 'On our knees before God, but on our own two feet before all men.'

Finally in from the cold, Qaddafi to lead the African Union

ADDIS ABABA: Muammar el-Qaddafi of Libya was elected Monday as leader of the African Union, a position long sought by the eccentric dictator pushing his oil-producing nation into the international mainstream after years of isolation.

Chavez Bonds Sink on President-for-Life Bid, Oil Drop

(Bloomberg) -- Bond investors are telling Hugo Chavez he should be voted out of office instead of winning his campaign to serve as Venezuela's president another 10 years.

Venezuelan bonds fell the most in Latin America since December, when Chavez began pushing for a referendum to abolish term limits so he can serve through at least 2019. The average yield on the government's dollar bonds rose to 17.40 percentage points more than Treasuries, from 14.74 points when he took office a decade ago, according to JPMorgan Chase & Co.

Energy ministry to implement 3-year strategy

Abu Dhabi: UAE Energy Minister Mohammad Bin Dha'en Al Hamili has stressed that the ministry would implement its three-year strategy to provide protection for the UAE oil, gas and oil industry exports from negative impacts of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

OPEC Plot Could Siphon 15-20% of Stimulus Dollars to Offshore Oil Suppliers' Bank Accounts

Congress's trillion dollar economic stimulus plan fails to address one of the primary threats to our future economic stability: OPEC's plan to push oil prices up which will siphon hundreds of millions of stimulus dollars to the offshore oil producers, according to John W. Rich, Jr., a leader in the waste coals to liquid transportation fuels field.

U of Minnesota study: Cellulosic ethanol may benefit human health and help slow climate change

Filling our fuel tanks with cellulosic ethanol instead of gasoline or corn-based ethanol may be even better for our health and the environment than previously recognized, according to new research from the University of Minnesota.

The study finds that cellulosic ethanol has fewer negative effects on human health because it emits smaller amounts of fine particulate matter, an especially harmful component of air pollution. Earlier work showed that cellulosic ethanol and other next-generation biofuels also emit lower levels of greenhouse gas emissions.

China links coal use and birth defects

In further evidence that China's love affair with coal is drawing to a close, government officials accept there is a link between high birth defect rates and pollution.

Green city rises from desert

About 10 miles along the motorway out of Abu Dhabi, Khaled Awad was trying his best to get visitors excited about a patch of scrubland. "This will be the city of the future," he said, gesturing toward the shrubs and dirt. "Zero-carbon and run on totally renewable energy, it will be one of the first and biggest eco-clusters in the world."

It takes some imagination. But Awad, head of development at Masdar City, insists that in a few years this plot of desert will be transformed into the most technologically advanced, environmentally friendly city in the world. Designed by the famed British architect Lord Foster, the 6.5 square kilometre "city of the future" will be suspended on stilts 20 ft above the ground, increasing air circulation and reducing the heat transferred from the hot desert floor.

Russia: Oil Output Declines, Price Stands Ground

Russian oil production fell to 9.7 million barrels per day in January, a 0.9 percent drop year on year, although the country's two largest producers still managed gains, data released Monday showed.

Production slid by an average of 60,000 barrels per day in January compared with the previous month, largely in line with expectations that low global prices would further eat into output, according to data from the Energy Ministry's monitoring center.

In December, Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin traveled to an OPEC meeting in Algeria to warn consumers that Russia would be forced to cut supplies if prices remained low. He said the drop would amount to 16 million tons, or roughly 3 percent below 2008 levels, with an average decline of 320,000 bpd.

Gas Production Drops by Over 10%

Russian gas production fell by more than one-tenth in January because of problems with

exports to Europe caused by a pricing dispute with Ukraine.

Energy Ministry data showed that gas output at Gazprom stood at 1.44 billion cubic meters per day, down 6.1 percent from December and 13.7 percent versus January 2008.

Exxon Mobil, Chevron Aren't Closing Checkbooks Just Yet

With oil's price diving and a recession gripping the globe, Exxon Mobil Corp. and Chevron Corp. aren't closing their checkbooks, even a little.

"We intend to continue to invest at these record levels at least over the next five years," Ken Cohen, Irving-based Exxon Mobil's vice president of public affairs, told reporters Friday. The company's \$26.1 billion in capital spending last year was 25 percent more than in 2007.

Shell Temporarily Grounds Sikorsky Choppers Amid Probe

In an unusual move prompted by concerns about the safety of a widely used model of Sikorsky helicopter, Royal Dutch Shell PLC's U.S. unit has temporarily grounded a fleet of the choppers, and instead is relying on boats to take most workers to and from oil platforms in the Gulf of Mexico.

Lightering our way to abundance

An old Wall Street shibboleth says that nobody rings a bell at the top. To prove the point, even as oil and other commodities were making blistering new highs on a daily basis last year, few people saw the carnage that was to come in those markets as the year progressed.

But the same cannot always be said at the bottom of a market. Quite often, there are many bells ringing. It's just that by the time a bottom arrives investors are usually too exhausted, too nervous or too broke even to care. And, it's true that the price of any commodity or stock can trace out a bottom for a very long time, longer than most people have patience, especially if they've already been burned in a crash. And so, the bells can go on ringing for years until they just seem like background noise.

The importance of Verleger for global oil policy

Which is the most misunderstood commodity in the world? Gold? ...Silver? According to renowned energy expert, Phil K Verleger Jr, neither of them is true. Petroleum is the answer. Back in May 2008 when petroleum prices were peaking, he said that price of

crude oil in summer of 2008 should be \$70 and not \$140 per barrel.

Endangered Electricity System

In August 2003, a tree fell into a power line on Ohio's electricity grid, causing more electricity to be rerouted across other high-voltage power lines to compensate. All was seemingly well. Within hours, however, three other major lines had failed, also due to falling trees. The cascading failures overloaded the entire Northeastern electricity grid and brought it crashing down. Over 50 million people were without power, 11 died, and the economic toll was calculated at some 6 billion dollars in that short period of time.

Was this an isolated incident, an unpredictable event that is unlikely to recur? In fact, the U.S. Department of Energy had warned of just such a calamity the year before, in a report titled the "National Transmission Grid Study."

Delhi residents plump for car pool as a viable option

New Delhi: The recent strike by the oil sector companies that made petrol and diesel scarce to the otherwise wheel-happy Delhi residents has been an eye-opener.

It has forced many to rethink about car pooling. With roughly 1,000 vehicles joining the Delhi traffic daily and its citizen's apparent aversion to public transport, car pooling is being considered a viable option and permanent solution to the increasing traffic jams in the city.

Guadeloupe paralyzed by widespread strikes

PARIS: A French minister flew to the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe on Sunday for talks aimed at ending a 13-day general strike over pay and prices that has paralyzed the French territory and threatens to fuel dissent at home.

Iraqi farmers struggle and hope

The biggest obstacles that could keep Iraq importing its food well into the future include:

- A shortage of electricity and fuel that blocks farmers from pumping water out of wells.
- Poor systems to deliver water from the Euphrates and Tigris rivers to farms. Khadim's area is served by one main canal constructed by the British in the 1930s, and another, in poor condition, that was built about 30 years ago by a Turkish company. Both need continual maintenance, Khadim says.

• Depleted seed and livestock supplies that were hindered first by the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s and then by United Nations sanctions that followed Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait through the following decade.

Car sales: From bad to worse

NEW YORK (CNNMoney.com) -- Consumers may have had an easier time getting car loans last month, but don't look for that to fuel a rebound in battered auto sales when automakers report their January sales Tuesday.

Auto finance units GMAC and Chrysler Financial received \$7.5 billion in federal loans between them since the waning days of December. That allowed them to make more attractive financing offers to a wider range of potential clients.

But forecasts of a modest pickup in sales to consumers are being more than offset by a sharp plunge in purchases by rental car companies, which in a typical year can buy close to 3 million vehicles a year.

Chrysler offers buyouts to all hourly workers

In an attempt to cut costs, struggling automaker offers cash and a voucher good for the purchase of a car to union employees that agree to leave company.

Tough choices for America's hungry

"We get like the mac and cheese, which is dehydrated cheese -- basically food that's no good for you health wise," she said. "Everything is high in sodium and trans fats ... and that's all we basically can afford. There's not enough assistance to eat healthy and maintain a healthy weight."

Advocates for the hungry say many people on the food stamp program opt to buy less-healthy foods because they can't afford fresh fruits and vegetables on such a tight budget.

Food stamp "benefits aren't really enough for a healthy diet," said Jim Weill, president of the nonprofit Food Research and Action Center.

Natural gas glut could hit U.S.

As many as seven massive natural gas export terminals are expected to start up overseas this year, expanding worldwide capacity by 20 percent and flooding markets with new supplies of the key power plant and heating fuel. Dozens of new tankers

capable of carrying natural gas in a liquefied form are slated to hit the seas.

Just as these new supplies come on line, worldwide demand is expected to drop as the global recession deepens.

Operators of these new facilities are unlikely to cut back production, however, so shipments of liquefied natural gas will most likely head to the deepest markets with the greatest amount of natural gas storage capacity — the United States.

...The wave of imports might even be strong enough to challenge growing domestic natural gas production from various shale formations, including the Barnett Shale near Fort Worth and Fayetteville Shale in Arkansas.

"This can put pressure on U.S. gas prices and could delay the full development of some of the new shale projects," Douglas said.

Global crisis casts shadow over Saudi's futuristic cities

King Abdullah Economic City, or KAEC, is one of six planned "economic cities" designed to help promote private investment and so wean Saudi Arabia's economy from oil and generate jobs. A tired policy mantra elsewhere, it has real urgency here. While the UAE is racing against the depletion of its petroleum reserves, Saudi Arabia is racing against its birth rate – about three of every five Saudis are under the age of 25.

But the global economic crisis has put an abrupt halt to the Gulf oil boom, and the easy money that came with it, casting doubt over whether KAEC and the rest of Saudi Arabia will generate enough private investment soon enough to defuse what many economists call a demographic time bomb.

Saudi buys 3 mln bbls fuel from Japanese trader

SINGAPORE/DUBAI (Reuters) - Saudi Aramco has agreed to buy about 3 million barrels of gas oil from Japanese trader Itochu, as rapidly rising demand for transport and power force the top oil exporter to import, traders said on Monday.

... The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has bought gas oil on the spot market for at least two years. Aramco has avoided long-term supply deals as the Kingdom strives for fuel self sufficiency.

Demand has been fuelled by heavy investment in economic development financed by record crude export revenues. It also may have been further fuelled by the need to burn oil products in some power stations instead of gas as the kingdom cuts oil output.

Gulf projects shock: Spending may actually rise in 2009

Government spending is set to continue on priority projects: ones that increase gas availability and power and water production.

The following sentence will shock. More money may be spent on projects in the GCC in 2009 than in 2008.

Energy industry capital expenditure in the region totalled about \$60bn in 2008, according to sources. The same sources forecast that the sector will spend almost \$70bn in the year to come. Non-energy project expenditures, which amounted to about \$200bn in 2008, may not grow, but they probably will not fall.

Tajikistan: New Year, New Energy Crisis

Until recently, most parts of Tajiksitan have had almost no electricity: only six hours a day. But at least what came during those six hours was steady. Now, the situation becomes worse.

Turkmenistan cut off electricity for Tajiksitan in the beginning of the year due to an ongoing disagreement between the latter and Uzbekistan on transit electricity prices.

UAE to donate 320MW power plant to Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): United Arab Emirates (UAE) has offered to donate power plant of 320 MW capacity as a gift to the people of Pakistan to help overcome energy crisis.

Minister for Water and Power, Raja Pervez Ashraf has left for Dubai (UAE) on Monday to sign an MoU with concerned UAE authorities and to work out the detailed plan for implementation of the agreement for the dismantling, packing and shifting of the plant to Pakistan.

Home insulation plan would aid economy

An economic stimulus should reduce the risk of a long-term economic crisis, but it should not make our energy crisis worse.

A major investment in home weatherization might lack support from lobbyists and interest groups, but it will meet both policy goals.

Cities, towns ready to vie for stimulus funds

WASHINGTON — A high-tech power plant fueled by wastewater residue. A section of

road that could ease rush-hour traffic woes. A 100-year-old school that needs wiring for the 21st century.

These are among the thousands of projects around the country that will be vying for money from Washington if the economic stimulus package — which has swelled to nearly \$900 billion in the Senate — is signed into law, possibly within two weeks.

Arab analyst blames Opec for collapse in prices

A prominent Arab energy analyst has blamed Opec for the collapse in crude prices, saying the oil cartel has failed to fully comply with output cuts and kept sending contradicting messages to the already sceptic market.

Nicholas Sarkis, Director General of the Paris-based Arab Petroleum Research Centre (APRC), which acts as an adviser to the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (Oapec), described Opec's behaviour in dealing with the faltering crude demand over the past few months as "suicidal."

PDVSA cash flow hit by crude price fall

CARACAS: Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA has built up debts with providers and skipped payments to some partners under the strain of falling oil prices, a sign President Hugo Chavez may face financial problems this year.

Deterioration of PDVSA's finances may make it harder to stabilise oil production that market sources say is already falling and may force cuts in the billions of dollars PDVSA spends on social programs that sustain the leftist Chavez's popularity.

The cash flow problems are among the first concrete effects of the oil-price collapse on Venezuela, where a five-year consumption boom continues even as the all-vital oil industry is being blindsided by collapsing prices.

Producer Spending Cuts May Shape Future Oil Price Rebound

Once demand stabilizes, oil prices could bounce back quickly. Cash-strapped producers have cut budgets faster and deeper than in past downturns, according to the oilfield services companies that are the recipients of much of that spending. The lack of investment is already speeding up the rate of decline in older fields, and delaying the start of new production. Service companies see a possible repeat of the last four years: During this period, prices rose to record levels as demand grew faster than new supplies, an imbalance that some in the industry attribute to a lack of investment during the previous downturn.

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia's January oil output rose slightly to 9.7 million barrels per day (41.01 million tonnes) from 9.66 million bpd in December, while exports via pipeline monopoly Transneft fell to 4.25 million bpd (18.0 million tonnes) from 4.36 million bpd.

The following oil production and exports data were supplied by Russia's Energy Ministry. The volume figures are in millions of tonnes and show the month's total and the year to date. Percentage change figures are based on daily volumes.

Iraq oilfields ready for revival, await foreigners

BASRA, Iraq (Reuters) - Next to a pipeline snaking across a desert in Iraq's south, villas built to house an expected influx of foreign oil workers stand empty.

Nearby, a faded plaque in Russian and Arabic commemorates the opening of a pumping station in 1972, a reminder of the foreign ties that helped Iraq develop its oil industry.

As U.S. President Barack Obama confronts the legacy of a war his predecessor launched almost six years ago, Iraq has once again begun to open its vast oil reserves to foreign companies.

China's natural gas output jumps to ninth in the world

China's oil and natural gas production in 2008 maintained double digit growth with an increase of 13.7 percent, according to the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC). This was the sixth consecutive year that China's oil and natural gas production recorded double digit growth.

Ruble Falls to 11-Year Low as Speculators Push to Break Target

(Bloomberg) -- The ruble slumped to its weakest level against the dollar in 11 years as investors speculated Russia will be forced to give up its currency defense after draining reserves.

Brazil's Real Weakens as Falling Crude Prices Hurt Trade Flows

(Bloomberg) -- Brazil's real weakened for a third day as falling prices of oil, one of the nation's top three exports, reduced trade flows to Latin America's biggest economy.

"The real is very tied to the performance of commodities because the currency market is heavily dependent on export flows," said Paulo Fujisaki, a foreign-exchange strategist at Socopa Corretora in Sao Paulo. Nearly two-thirds of Brazil's exports are commodities.

Teachers aims at Petrocan

Long dissatisfied with what it sees as the oil company's poor performance, the giant pension fund is about to take a more activist role in Petro-Canada.

Kuwaiti companies will need to restructure or consolidate in 2009 to attract much needed capital and emerge stronger

The Kuwaiti business landscape has dramatically changed over the past few months affected by the world's liquidity crisis, deteriorating oil prices, postponed infrastructure projects, and the lack of an immediate and clear domestic stimulus package addressing many of the country's ailing but vital economic sectors including financial services and building materials.

Wind turbine firms feel downturn's pinch

Last summer, wind turbine manufacturers couldn't make parts fast enough to meet demand. Now, industry executives say, financing has all but disappeared because of the economy, causing some planned projects to be put on hold. Unless there's a robust economic rebound, or the government steps in, they say, construction of wind turbines nationwide will be set back, and the companies that make turbine parts could be forced to cut jobs.

Lithium deposits could power long-exploited Bolivia's future

Government officials think that Bolivia possesses the world's biggest lithium reserves, and they also think that the country is poised to profit big-time from the automakers' push to develop electric cars that will run on lithium ion batteries.

Obama's Billions for Energy Fuel Stanford, MIT Research Dreams

Researchers at U.S. universities, led by Berkeley, Stanford University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, are targeting the \$2 billion in energy research funds contained in the House recovery bill. The research dollars will produce jobs, reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil and stem the production of greenhouse gases, according to the Association of American Universities, a group of 62 schools that conduct research.

Carmakers fear emission plan could ruin recovery

SACRAMENTO – When President Barack Obama moved to increase gas mileage and curb tailpipe emissions last week, the leaders of the battle against global warming rejoiced.

But his directives could steer automakers and the buying public down a bumpy road.

Along the way, critics warn, near-insolvent automakers will be forced to invest billions in new technology all the while hoping higher sticker prices and more-limited selections don't scare customers away from showrooms.

Project envisions post oil Vegas

The goal was to address social, economic and environmental problems in Las Vegas and answer how they can be addressed for the year 2016 when the global supply of oil will be steadily declining. Lee-Anne Milburn, an associate professor at UNLV explained that "the whole idea was that [the groups] had to look out to 2016 when we are running out of oil...They [were] supposed to figure out how we need to redesign Las Vegas to deal with the fact that we're going to have less oil, less ability to drive."

City decides to test cycle lanes on Burrard Bridge

The City of Vancouver will temporarily close up to two lanes on the Burrard Bridge this spring while it tests designated cycling lanes on the crossing.

The tests will look at the safety of both cyclists and pedestrians, who now share the bridge sidewalks, and how the reduced lanes affect traffic.

Melting Arctic Prompts Calls for 'National Park' on Ice

With arctic sea ice melting like ice cubes in soda, scientists want to protect a region they say will someday be the sole remaining frozen bastion of a disappearing world.

Spanning the northern Canadian archipelago and western Greenland, it would be the first area formally protected in response to climate change, and a last-ditch effort to save polar bears and other animals.

Dispatches from the frontline of a mission to save the world

The Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy was recently launched at Leeds University to drive forward the green agenda. Here six of its top scientists discuss the key issues.

Rising sea salinates Ganges - expert

KOLKATA (Reuters) – Rising sea levels are causing salt water to flow into India's biggest river, threatening its ecosystem and turning vast farmlands barren in the country's east, a climate change expert warned on Monday.

It's Time To Adapt To Climate Change, Scientists Say

In the United States, most of the debate over climate change is focused on how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. But some environmentalists say we're talking too much about how to prevent our climate from changing -- and not enough about how to adapt to change that's already here.

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