



Drumbeat: April 5, 2009

Posted by [Leanan](#) on April 5, 2009 - 9:38am

Topic: [Miscellaneous](#)

[Students Give Up Wheels for Their Own Two Feet](#)

LECCO, Italy — Each morning, about 450 students travel along 17 school bus routes to 10 elementary schools in this lakeside city at the southern tip of Lake Como. There are zero school buses.

In 2003, to confront the triple threats of childhood obesity, local traffic jams and — most important — a rise in global greenhouse gases abetted by car emissions, an environmental group here proposed a retro-radical concept: children should walk to school.

[Saudi Arabia Cuts Oil Prices for U.S., Europe for May](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Saudi Aramco, the world's largest state-owned oil company, cut its official selling prices for all grades for customers in the U.S., Northwestern and Mediterranean Europe.

Saudi Arabia slashed the U.S. price of its Arab Heavy Crude the most, cutting it by \$5.50 a barrel to \$4.85 below the price of the West Texas Intermediate grade made in the U.S., the state oil company said in a faxed statement today. That wiped out its April price premium of 65 cents more than WTI, the first time Saudi heavy oil traded for more than the U.S. benchmark in at least 10 years.

[Oil industry spared as New Mexico legislative session ends](#)

New Mexico's legislators wrapped up their regular session late last month and Ben Shepperd, executive vice president of the Permian Basin Petroleum Association, said local operators with oil operations in the state could heave a sigh of relief.

For the first time in several years, Shepperd said, the legislative session came to an end without any bills harmful to the industry being passed.

[Consortium Drops Its Plan to Build New Power Lines](#)

A consortium of private investors that sought to build high-voltage electricity transmission lines to carry power from renewable sources upstate to New York City said on Friday that it was suspending its efforts.

[Gas company sues 17 more landowners](#)

EAST CALN -- Another 17 property owners are facing a lawsuit to have a portion of their property condemned by Williams, the natural gas company that filed eminent domain proceedings against them Wednesday in federal court.

[Gazprom Calls Ukraine-EU Accord a 'Political Mistake'](#)

(Bloomberg) -- OAO Gazprom Chief Executive Officer Alexei Miller said a declaration signed by Ukraine and the European Union on improving the Ukrainian pipeline network was a "political mistake."

The document "poured oil onto the fire" of a January conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Miller told the heads of Eni SpA, E.ON AG and GDF Suez SA at a meeting in Moscow, the state-run company said in an e-mailed statement today.

[The Great Biodiesel Shutdown](#)

Several large biodiesel makers have stopped producing any of the fuel.

[Producers look to next generation of biofuels](#)

The federal government wants to expand biofuel production by nearly two-thirds in the next five years, with specific quotas for advanced biofuels made from such ingredients as grass, algae, enzymes or yeast.

But older biofuel companies are facing financial ruin, hammered by low fuel prices.

[Study: Low-Carbon Fuel Standards Are Unlikely to Reduce Warming](#)

A low-carbon fuels standard is likely to do little to reduce global warming emissions and can even be counterproductive, according to a paper published in the American Economic Journal: Economic Policy.

The study, by three academics, found that the policy reduces consumption of high-

carbon fuels like oil, but “increases low carbon fuel production, possibly increasing net carbon emissions.”

[The Nuclear Goliath: Confronting Industrial Energy](#)

Lately, many may have heard the affable radio jingles for nuclear energy as a clean and reliable candidate to supplant the U.S.'s reliance on foreign fossil fuels. This is sheer, malignant propaganda. Nuclear energy, along with its requisite mining, is not only unsustainable to a high degree, but is, in all aspects, violently rapacious as it dissolves the planet's fecundity and ultimately encumbers the creation of life for generations to come. It is imperative that nuclear is removed from the lexicon of domestic energy policy and that we, as a people, consider alternative energy options while significantly reducing our consumption levels.

[U.N. Sees Falling Middle East Fertility Rates](#)

Eight of the 15 countries that experienced the biggest drop in population growth since 1980 are in the Middle East, led by Iran, United Nations population experts say.

Hania Zlotnik, director of the population division at the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, said the shift suggests that education and access to family planning can play a far greater role than expected in reducing population growth, even in conservative Muslim states.

[Study: Cool Spells Normal in Warming World](#)

Scientists show why cool spells do not, on their own, undercut warming projections.

[In America, Labor Has an Unusually Long Fuse](#)

The workers and other protesters who gathered en masse at the Group of 20 summit meeting last week in London were continuing a time-honored European tradition of taking their grievances into the streets.

Two weeks earlier, more than a million workers in France demonstrated against layoffs and the government's handling of the economic crisis, and in the last month alone, French workers took their bosses hostage four times in various labor disputes. When General Motors recently announced huge job cuts worldwide, 15,000 workers demonstrated at the company's German headquarters.

But in the United States, where G.M. plans its biggest layoffs, union members have seemed passive in comparison. They may yell at the television news, but that's about all. Unlike their European counterparts, American workers have largely stayed off the

streets, even as unemployment soars and companies cut wages and benefits.

[Newt Gingrich: Our Tanks Are On Full](#) - *The energy crisis is an artificial one, created by bad policies*

Let's be clear: our energy crisis is not due to a lack of American energy resources. We have more coal than any other country in the world. There are 86 billion barrels of oil and 420 trillion cubic feet of natural gas lying undeveloped offshore. Shale-oil reservoirs in parts of Colorado and Utah could hold upwards of 1 trillion barrels of oil—more than three times the proven reserves in Saudi Arabia. Nuclear power is a clean source of energy that produces zero carbon emissions. It generates 20 percent of America's electric power today, and with the right investment could generate far more.

Instead, America is suffering from an artificial energy crisis, one that is the product of our government's policies, not despite them. For example, until September 2008, Congress had made it illegal to drill for oil and natural gas in most areas off our coasts. Congress still forbids the development of the vast shale-oil reserves in the Rocky Mountains even though there are promising technologies that could make extracting oil from shale economically competitive. In addition, laws passed in the 1970s banning the recycling of spent nuclear fuel forced nuclear-power plants to invest in techniques to dispose of the fuel; the long-running feud over where to store the spent fuel has helped prevent the construction of more plants.

[Products for the other 3 billion](#)

A new breed of idealistic technologist is building ultracheap baby incubators, medicine dispensers, and solar-powered lamps. Welcome to entrepreneurship circa 2009.

[Chinese Hunger for Sons Fuels Boys' Abductions](#)

The centuries-old tradition of cherishing boys — and a custom that dictates that a married woman moves in with her husband's family — is reinforced by a modern reality: Without a real social safety net in China, many parents fear they will be left to fend for themselves in old age.

The extent of the problem is a matter of dispute. The Chinese government insists there are fewer than 2,500 cases of human trafficking each year, a figure that includes both women and children. But advocates for abducted children say there may be hundreds of thousands.

[Shrinking airlines park more planes in the desert](#)

MARANA, Ariz. – Old jets come here, empty engine pods shrink-wrapped in white, tall red tails fading to pink in the desert sun. More will come soon. Some will never fly again.

Airlines have announced plans over the past year to take 1,700 planes out of service as fewer people fly. United Airlines is retiring all 94 of its Boeing 737s by the end of this year, and Northwest Airlines has cut its old DC-9 fleet by about a third.

The number of planes in storage has jumped 29 percent in the past year to 2,302, according to aerospace data firm Ascend Worldwide. That includes 930 parked by U.S. operators alone.

Eventually, some will be sold, some scrapped, some will sit at desert facilities in southern California, Arizona, and New Mexico. But at the moment, their number is growing faster than expected. The banking crisis has made it very difficult to get loans to buy aircraft, and the drop in commodity prices has gutted their scrap value.

[How many cars will we need?](#)

While vehicle sales have geared down, experts say the industry will rebound. But how much and when?

[Gas guzzlers lead a used car revival as petrol prices fall and buyers rush to pick up bargains](#)

For years, used car prices have seen a fall of about four per cent in April. But this year average prices across all 05 to 08 number plates have risen by an average of five per cent, with sales of the much-criticised 'Chelsea tractor' 4x4s leading the way in the South-East.

Bargain-hunters are shunning the environmentalists' message and flocking to showrooms and auction houses to snap up cut-price fourwheel drive vehicles.

[Jump-start for the green car future](#)

One drawback of the electric car is the time it takes to recharge but now a company is planning a network of stations that will do the work in minutes rather than hours.

[If not oil, what is driving gas prices?](#)

I am really confused. (Hey, I heard that. Yes, I am confused about many things, but I only have enough space to address one issue today.) We have watched the price of gasoline pingpong from about \$1.81 to \$2.09 for some time now. Not bad, compared to \$3 a gallon, but confusing, nonetheless. For a long time, the price of a barrel of oil was as low as it had been in years, but the price of gas did not go down.

[South Africa: We need green power now](#)

The central driver for this transition lies in the choices over our future energy path. Presently Eskom wants to lock us into an unsustainable energy future, where its R1.3-trillion build programme will be almost exclusively focused on new coal-fired and nuclear power stations.

The ID believes that we can, and must, adopt a completely different approach to our energy future. Firstly, we need to immediately implement a comprehensive energy-efficiency strategy which will save our economy money and reduce our energy demand. Solar water heaters need to be rolled out on a massive scale which could save in excess of 3500 megawatts of energy, the equivalent of one coal-fired power station.

It is revealing that the absolute cost of such a programme would be half of what is required to build a new coal-fired power station and will create tens of thousands of jobs at a skills level where the majority of our population can benefit.

[Bolivia Will Up Natural Gas Exports to Argentina in Winter Months](#)

BUENOS AIRES – Bolivia has agreed to sell up to 6.5 million cubic meters (229 million cubic feet) per day of natural gas to Argentina during the upcoming Southern Hemisphere winter, Argentine state-run media reported.

[Europeans Offer Few New Troops for Afghanistan](#)

STRASBOURG, France — With protesters raging outside, NATO leaders on Saturday gave a tepid troop commitment to President Obama's escalating campaign in Afghanistan, mostly committing soldiers only to a temporary security duty.

[Pakistan: Industrialists demand uninterrupted power supply](#)

KARACHI: Industrialists and small businessmen have urged the government to immediately install rental power plants in order to properly cope up with the power crisis, which is halting industrial production in the country.

[Can Pakistan Be Governed?](#)

Terrorists. Secessionists. Angry neighbors. Smoldering generals. And Asif Ali Zardari, with the job of keeping his country from becoming the most dangerous failed state in the world.

[Two oil projects in Saudi Arabia face delays](#)

Two projects designed to help raise Saudi Arabia's oil production capacity beyond 12.5 million barrels daily face delays, suggesting the world's top oil exporter is in no hurry to add more spare capacity as demand slumps.

Saudi Arabia has cut output by nearly 2 million barrels per day (bpd) to less than 8 million bpd over the past six months in line with agreements in OPEC to rebalance world oil markets, creating a huge overhang of spare capacity.

...SNC-Lavalin, a Canadian engineering firm, has almost completed a contract to boost output from the Shaybah oilfield by 50 per cent to 750,000 bpd, but a further 250,000 bpd expansion has been delayed, according to Al Watan, a Saudi newspaper, reportedly until the global economy improves.

On Friday, Saipem, the Italian oilfield services group, said it expected Aramco to agree to an amended contract to develop the Manifa oilfield.

But even if that happened, the project was likely to be delayed by 12 to 18 months, Pietro Tali, the chief executive of the firm, told Reuters on the sidelines of an oil conference in Paris.

[Gulf giants keep UK's gas flowing](#)

A new type of supertanker can supply the whole of Britain for eight hours.

[Asian firms on Iraq shortlist for oil deals](#)

Asian companies are among nine firms shortlisted by the Iraqi oil ministry for contracts in 11 oil and gas fields, according to a document obtained by AFP on Saturday.

[PDVSA Signs Agreement to Participate in Iranian Oil Fields](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Petroleos de Venezuela SA, the state oil company, signed a memorandum of understanding to participate in 17 oil fields in Iran, according to an e-mailed statement from Venezuela's Information and Communications Ministry.

[China, Ecuador move toward energy deal](#)

China is close to inking a one-billion-dollar deal to receive Ecuadorian oil, President Rafael Correa said on Saturday.

"China has offered us initial capital worth one billion dollars for infrastructure projects,

we are going to pay little by little with our oil," Correa said during a weekly television address.

[Nagging doubts over North Sea workhorse](#)

At 1.57pm on Wednesday, around 50 minutes after the Super Puma AS 332L2 helicopter left the rig, Aberdeen Coastguard received a desperate message from Paul Burnham, the 31-year-old pilot. "Mayday, mayday — oh f***!" were his final words before his radio went silent.

[Dead Media Beat: The Chaos Scenario, Among the Ruins of Mass Media](#)

One has to wonder how a magazine that sells news about advertising stays alive to publish this article, when news is dying from lack of advertising revenue.

I'm believing this "chaos scenario," but I'm also wondering if "chaos" is the front porch of a "long emergency" and "new dark age." Of course -- if you were entering a "long emergency," and there was nobody left to tell you about that reality except for James Howard Kunstler and his noncommercial folksinger guitar, would that *be* an emergency at all? Maybe you'd just be functionally illiterate and dwelling in your favela, like the usual condition of most human beings outside hyperactive market capitalism.

[Crippled by credit in Russia rust belt](#)

KARABASH, Russia (Reuters) - Each weekend, copper worker Sergei Begutov cuts stones from this toxic, frozen hillside and sells them for five roubles (\$0.15) apiece to help fund car loan repayments that now exceed his wages.

Like workers across Russia, he has been thrust into poverty by the economic crisis as plunging wages render unaffordable repayments on loans that had offered a taste of a better life.

[Hyundai to go ahead with eco cars](#)

GOYANG, South Korea (Reuters) - Hyundai Motor Group, the world's No. 5 automaker, will go ahead with plans to develop environment-friendly cars despite the segment's low profitability and an industry downturn, a senior executive said on Thursday.

[Panel Discussion](#)

Most of the time, a single customer has relatively little in the way of bargaining power with a larger business entity. A pack of customers introduces a different dynamic. That's why, for instance, your company or trade group can get you a better deal on health insurance than you might get on your own. Collective buying power has been harnessed in various ways in the past, but generally speaking the strategy has been marginal among contemporary American consumers, maybe because it doesn't mesh well with the rugged individualist's self-image.

Then again, in a cultural moment when many individuals aren't feeling all that rugged, perhaps it makes sense that a company called 1BOG has put collective buying at the center of its business model. The name is derived from the phrase "one block off the grid," a reference to the goal of rounding up groups of homeowners willing to install solar-power systems on their houses — removing the rough equivalent of one block from a city's electrical grid.

[G-Oil, Made From Animal Fat, Becomes Official Oil for Le Mans Series](#)

Unlike traditional petrochemical-based motor oils from leading manufacturers, Green Earth Technologies' G-OIL is made with American-grown renewable animal fats. These saturated fats, whose molecular single-bond carbon chains are similar to common petroleum oils, have no harsh effects on the environment, and drastically cut our dependence on foreign oil.

[Area GM research into fuel cell development moving forward](#)

You are probably asking what is next. Well, we need to continue to work all of the remaining issues to get us to the durability and cost that you as customers expect for a mainstream vehicle. Our country needs to step up to develop a strategic energy policy that comprehends the needs for energy security, energy independence and future American competitiveness. It is a bit scary to see what is being done in Europe and Japan around the development of hydrogen infrastructure, while in this country, we still debate whether global warming is real or that we may have hit peak oil.

[Will dams on Amazon tributary wreak global havoc?](#)

VOLTA GRANDE, Brazil — The Xingu River, the largest tributary of the Amazon, runs wide and swift this time of year. Its turquoise waters are home to some 600 species of fish, including several not found anywhere else on the planet. A thick emerald canopy of trees hugs its banks, except in places where man has carved out pastures for cattle.

Now man, in the form of the Brazilian state power company, wants to harness a section of the Xingu by building the world's third-biggest dam.

Called the Belo Monte, the dam would drown 200 square miles of tropical rainforest — an area equivalent to the sprawling city of Tucson, Ariz. — and would flood the homes of

19,000 people. It would be only one of more than a dozen dams that the Brazilian government is planning to construct on tributaries of the Amazon, the world's mightiest river.

[NJ sets ambitious goals for wind and solar power production](#)

"Right now, one of every two households in New Jersey gets its electricity from nuclear energy. If you take nuclear energy off line, where will the energy come from?" said David Benson, a spokesman for Oyster Creek.

Gov. Jon Corzine has vowed to have 30 percent of the state's electricity produced through wind and solar power by 2020 -- an initiative that even his supporters call ambitious.

[Reaching Congress on Climate Change Issues: Interview with Alyssa Burgin](#)

We are projecting five million new jobs nationally, and again, the disproportionate number could land in Texas, due to our ability to host wind and solar farms. People who have farmed their land for generations, and have met frustration and despair due to lack of rainfall could see a new and profitable use for their property. Men and women who are tired of low-wage jobs could train for these very lucrative positions, and find a new life. Peak oil is in our past--we have to move forward into a new future, and our bill is perfect for Texas.

[It's so last year: Vanity Fair abandons the 'green issue'](#)

Spring has sprung, and everything is going green. Everything, that is, except Vanity Fair, which has decided to ditch its annual "green issue". For the past three years, the monthly glossy has made much of dedicating its May issue to the environment: from Leonardo DiCaprio posing on an iceberg to last year's open letter from Robert Kennedy Jnr to the next president calling for action on global warming. This year, the incipient tradition has been quietly dropped.

[30 million Bangladeshis affected by climate change: Rights group](#)

DHAKA: A Bangladeshi rights group yesterday called for recognising environmental refugees with free economic migration rights under UN covenants as it estimated some 30 million people of the South Asian country are already exposed to climate change.

[Obama pledges US to lead on fighting climate change](#)

(PRAGUE) - The United States is now ready to lead the drive to tackle climate change, President Barack Obama said on Sunday, as EU leaders pushed him to follow their ambitious targets to cut global warming.

[Czech dinner snub](#)

President Obama has declined the invitation of dinner with President Klaus in Prague Castle. ...The First Lady and her husband will be eating modern Czech cuisine in a romantic top restaurant. I don't know what the Czech head of state will be doing but it's clear his lack of belief in climate change, and support for President Bush doesn't go down well at the new White House.

[US hosts Arctic-Antarctic summit as melting speeds up](#)

Washington - The United States will bring together the world's government's for a summit on the state of the North and South Poles on Monday, in what environmentalists have billed as a chance to draw attention to some of the most visible effects of global warming. The nearly two-week gathering, which will be kicked off in Washington by US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, includes government representatives and scientists from 47 countries.

[Ice Bridge Holding Antarctic Shelf in Place Shatters](#)

OSLO (Reuters) - An ice bridge which had held a vast Antarctic ice shelf in place for hundreds of years at least shattered on Saturday and may herald a wider collapse linked to global warming, a leading scientist said.

"It's amazing how the ice has ruptured. Two days ago it was intact," David Vaughan, a glaciologist with the British Antarctic Survey, told Reuters of a satellite image of the Wilkins Ice Shelf. "We've waited a long time to see this."

The satellite picture, by the European Space Agency (ESA), showed that a 40-km (25 mile) long strip of ice believed to pin the Wilkins Ice Shelf in place had snapped at its narrowest point of about 500 meters wide off the Antarctic Peninsula.

The break left a jumble of huge flat-topped icebergs in the sea. The loss of the ice bridge, which was almost 100 km wide in 1950 and had been in place for hundreds of years at least, could allow ocean currents to wash away more of the Wilkins.



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