



Drumbeat: August 6, 2009

Posted by [Leanan](#) on August 6, 2009 - 10:20am

Topic: [Miscellaneous](#)

[Britain's energy crisis: How long till the lights go out?](#)

IN THE frigid opening days of 2009, Britain's electricity demand peaked at 59 gigawatts (GW). Just over 45% of that came from power plants fuelled by gas from the North Sea. A further 35% or so came from coal, less than 15% from nuclear power and the rest from a hotch-potch of other sources. By 2015, assuming that modest economic growth resumes, a reasonable guess is that Britain will need around 64GW to cope with similar conditions. Where will that come from?

North Sea gas has served Britain well, but supply peaked in 1999. Since then the flow has fallen by half; by 2015 it will have dropped by two-thirds. By 2015 four of Britain's ten nuclear stations will have shut and no new ones could be ready for years after that. As for coal, it is fiendishly dirty: Britain will be breaking just about every green promise it has ever made if it is using anything like as much as it does today. Renewable energy sources will help, but even if the wind and waves can be harnessed (and Britain has plenty of both), these on-off forces cannot easily replace more predictable gas, nuclear and coal power. There will be a shortfall—perhaps of as much as 20GW—which, if nothing radical is done, will have to be met from imported gas. A large chunk of it may come from Vladimir Putin's deeply unreliable and corrupt Russia.

[The looming electricity crunch: Dark days ahead](#)

SOUTH AFRICAN burglars pay close attention to electricity. A moratorium in the early 1990s stopped new power stations from being built, and by 2007 demand was overwhelming the country's electricity grid. So Eskom, the national power company, began cutting supplies to specific suburbs for hours at a time. One side-effect of the rolling blackouts that afflicted Cape Town and Johannesburg was that they disabled the electric fences, spotlights and alarms that adorn richer people's houses, making them easy pickings for thieves. At first the blackouts were announced in advance; later, aware of the risks, Eskom imposed them without notice. Fortunately for South Africans, the economic slump has trimmed demand (and a huge, rushed building programme boosted supply), but it will be 2013 before order is properly restored.

Britain is running short of power too—so quickly that some economists claim, only just tongue-in-cheek, that the economic slowdown is useful. "A recession is the best

demand-reduction policy ever invented,” says Dieter Helm, an energy economist at Oxford University. Many power stations are due to close over the coming decade (see chart 1), and supplies are getting tight. The government reckons that, of a total of around 75GW in generating capacity, 20GW will disappear by 2015.

[Chevron Plans to Sell \\$100 Million in Plants, Assets](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Chevron Corp., the second-largest U.S. oil company, plans to sell plants, equipment and other assets valued at \$100 million by the end of 2009.

The San Ramon, California-based company disclosed the asset-sale plan today in a public filing. Chevron didn't specify what types of assets it intends to sell.

[Turkey and Russia Strike Deal Allowing Pipeline](#)

ISTANBUL, — Turkey has agreed to offer Russia the use of its territorial waters in constructing the a gas pipeline under the Black Sea, a move that will help Moscow maintain its energy dominance in Europe.

The deal came as more than 15 protocols were signed in the capital, Ankara, on Thursday by Russia's prime minister, Vladimir V. Putin, and his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, to encourage bilateral energy, economic and cultural cooperation.

[Mexico States May Issue Bonds to Bolster Finances, Delgado Says](#)

Mexico's budget deficit, which includes the servicing of debt from a 1990s bank bailout, will reach the equivalent of 3 percent of gross domestic product this year from 2.1 percent in 2008 and in 2007, the government predicts.

The gap may swell to as much as 6 percent of GDP by 2015 because state oil company Petroleos Mexicanos may fail to bring enough new wells on-line to offset a decline in output at its Cantarell field, Morgan Stanley said.

[Amnesty starts for Nigeria oil region but militants split](#)

LAGOS (Reuters) - A 60-day amnesty period for gunmen in Nigeria's oil-producing Niger Delta began Thursday but key militant factions were divided over whether to take

part and critics said it might only bring a lull in the violence.

President Umaru Yar'Adua offered an unconditional pardon in June to all militant fighters who take part in the amnesty, a bid to stem unrest which has prevented Nigeria from pumping much above two-thirds of its oil capacity in recent years.

[Why there will always be an energy crisis, part 1](#)

Well, at least an energy crisis for oil...

People often talk about oil as if it were a normal commodity, and apply textbook paradigms to understand why oil should trade higher or lower than it does. Perhaps the standard paradigm for a commodity is that marginal cost must equal marginal revenue. Yet, oil is a special commodity in that it's fundamental to sustained economic growth. Oil packs so energy-dense that it's tremendously efficient. Productivity gains, especially in developing economies, and in the US at one time, are based strongly on increasing mechanical power leveraged through oil. Because of oil's strategic importance, there's plenty of reason that it should trade higher than it might otherwise would. And given the strategic wrangling over resources (such as the Iraq War, among many others), it's clear that oil is not just plain old pork bellies.

[U.S. fuel sanctions to hurt Iran, a boon for traders](#)

DUBAI/LONDON (Reuters) - U.S. sanctions against suppliers of fuel to Iran would drive up the price the Islamic Republic has to pay for imports and provide a big money-making opportunity for oil traders able to flout the measures.

Sanctions busting has proved lucrative in the past for the less scrupulous in the opaque world of oil trade and could do so again if new measures seek to limit sales into Iran.

"Oil flows are really determined by market forces rather than politics and that's the bottom line," said analyst Raja Kiwan of PFC Energy. "Politics can be an obstacle, but can't block the flow."

[Petro-Canada Short Gasoline at Over 50 Outlets, Sends Rail Cars](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Petro-Canada dispatched rail cars from Montreal after a storm-related power outage July 18 shut units at its refinery near Edmonton, Alberta, causing a shortage of the fuel at more than 50 of the company's filling stations.

"We are doing a number of things to alleviate the supply situation," said Sneha Seetal, a company spokeswoman, in a telephone interview. Between July 20 and July 24, the

company loaded 32 rail cars in Montreal with fuel to augment the shortage, she said.

[Jet fuel probe to ensure no 2010 shortages](#)

JOHANNESBURG — A jet fuel shortfall at Africa's busiest airport will be investigated to ensure no shortages during the 2010 football World Cup, South Africa's energy minister said Thursday.

Minister Dipuo Peters announced a multi-sector team to probe the dropping of fuel stocks at OR Tambo International airport to a two-day stockpile which the airport said was due to interruptions in the country's supply network.

[Bangladesh Looks to the Sea for Energy Security](#)

Bangladesh is among a group of the world's poorest countries that may be sitting on top of untold oil and gas wealth, but can't exploit it due to ownership arguments.

But with severe economic problems driving it forward, Dhaka is soon to go ahead and award a string of offshore exploration blocks, including to major international companies like Conocophillips (COP).

[Govt studying uniform domestic gas price - Deora](#)

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - India will examine a uniform domestic price for natural gas, which is now sold at rates ranging from \$1 to \$5.73 per million British thermal units (mBtu) depending on source, Oil Minister Murli Deora said on Thursday.

"A study to consider the feasibility of having a uniform cost price regime is being undertaken, the report of which is expected to be made available within three months," he told lawmakers in a written statement.

Currently, the government fixes the price of gas produced from blocks given on nomination to state-run Oil and Natural Gas Corp and Oil India, while for others pricing is determined in line with the production sharing contracts.

[Clinton Seeks U.S. Africa Gains as China Expands Oil Purchases](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Secretary of State Hillary Clinton shifts to economic statecraft this week

on an African tour that stops in major oil and mineral exporters as she seeks advantages for U.S. investors in a market where China is making inroads.

After six months of dealing with North Korean provocations, Iran's election unrest and a coup in Honduras, Clinton will turn to issues of trade and energy in sub-Saharan Africa. She will spend time in Nigeria and Angola, two of the biggest suppliers of crude oil to the U.S.

[KBR awarded Yanbu refinery deal](#)

KBR has been awarded an engineering, procurement and construction contract by ConocoPhillips and Saudi Aramco for the Yanbu refinery.

[Saudi economy expected to lose SR478bn](#)

A sharp decline in Saudi Arabia's oil income will depress its economy by a whopping SR478 billion (Dh468bn) in 2009, more than the combined economies of Bahrain and Oman, according to independent estimates.

It will be the first major decline in the kingdom's gross domestic product in nearly seven years and one of the largest annual falls in its economic history.

From a record SR1,753bn in 2008, the GDP of the world's oil superpower is projected to crash to nearly SR1,275bn in 2009, its lowest level since 2005, the Riyadh-based Jadwa Investment said.

[Saudi takes away a source of monthly dread](#)

Every month the world's leading oil exporter Saudi Arabia sets official selling prices for its crude. It is an event of major importance for physical oil traders — and, until very recently, of major dread for energy reporters.

For years, the Saudi prices were among the most difficult pieces of information to track down and relay in a timely and accurate fashion.

As if sensing that pain, Saudi state oil company Aramco in June started to issue the prices by email.

[Saudi Arabia to build Energy Park](#)

DHAHRAN -- An Energy Park will be established in Dammam, Saudi Arabia following the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Saudi Aramco and Oilfields Service Contracting Co. (OSCC).

OSCC will plan, build, own and operate the complex, the first project of its type in Saudi Arabia to adopt the Common User Supply Base concept. Under this arrangement, OSCC will provide full-service logistical capabilities, leaving clients to focus on their core business, i.e. oil and gas equipment manufacturing and services.

[Petroplus Gains the Most in 8 Months After Net Beats Estimates](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Petroplus Holdings AG, Europe's largest independent oil refiner, rose the most since January in Zurich trading after second-quarter profit beat estimates.

Petroplus gained 10 percent to 19.85 Swiss francs as of 12:35 p.m. local time. That values the Zug, Switzerland-based company at 1.35 billion francs (\$1.26 billion).

"Operating results were markedly above our expectations, mainly due to higher throughput rates and improved cost control," Martin Schreiber, an analyst at Zuercher KantonalBank in Zurich, said today in an e-mail. "The company provided a rather positive outlook in the short term," said Schreiber, who has an "overweight" rating on the stock.

[Water Problems From Drilling Are More Frequent Than Officials Said](#)

Methane released from gas drilling has caused a fatal explosion and water contamination across seven counties in Pennsylvania.

[Solar power towers have maker beaming](#)

As California and the nation seek to make electricity without burning fossil fuels, a new entrant jumped on the grid yesterday by focusing sunlight from 24,000 mirrors on a pair of towers north of Los Angeles.

The 850-degree heat atop the 160-foot towers boiled water, and when the resulting steam spun a turbine on the ground, the plant built by Pasadena-based eSolar became the first commercial solar tower project in the United States.

[Bill McKibben: Four years after my pleading essay, climate art is hot](#)

That pleading little essay I wrote in 2005? It was probably the last moment I could have written it. Clearly there were lots and lots of people already thinking the same way, because ever since it's seemed to me as if deep and moving images and sounds and words have been flooding out into the world.

That torrent of art has been, often, deeply disturbing—it should be deeply disturbing, given what we're doing to the earth. (And none of it has quite matched the performance work that nature itself is providing. Check out, for instance, Jim Balog's time-lapse photography of glaciers crashing into the sea—if we could somehow crowd that thrashing sheet of ice into the Guggenheim for a week, people would truly get it.) But for me, it's been more comforting than disturbing, because it means that the immune system of the planet is finally kicking in.

[America's high-speed rail off to a slow start](#)

President Obama may call a nationwide high-speed passenger rail network a priority, but it's going to take a lot more than \$8 billion to make it happen.

[Finnish Firms Announce Electric Car Plans](#)

Valmet Automotive and Fortum will develop a new technology and build a concept car for four people that could be driven for up to 99 miles with one charge.

[What energy crisis?](#)

Zurich - General Motors vice chairman Bob Lutz said in a newspaper interview published on Thursday that US consumers still wanted to buy big, gas-guzzler cars and suggested that GM had to respond to that demand.

Lutz told the Swiss newspaper Tages-Anzeiger that the ailing US auto giant had decided this week to ramp up production of big pick-up trucks and sports utility vehicles in the United States because stocks had nearly run bare.

"It remains a fact that the American public buys big, high consumption, cars," he said.

"It is completely wrong to hope that Americans will massively rush to economical vehicles."

[Battery Shortage Slows Prius Sales; Will Batteries Hold Back Hybrids?](#)

The Toyota Prius is among the most popular cars under the Cash For Clunkers program right now. But many people who want one will have to wait, as production of the popular hybrid has slowed because of a battery shortage. The supplier of Prius batteries, Panasonic EV Energy, can not keep up with Toyota's 500,000 annual Prius capacity. While Panasonic EV says it should have its production capacity ramped up to a million units annually by mid-2010, this begs the bigger question;

Will battery packs hold back hybrid production and development?

[Run-of-river projects in limbo following BCUC decision](#)

Run-of-river power projects are in limbo after the B.C. Utilities Commission rejected the province's long-term power acquisition plan, according to a local proponent.

[How To Live Without Air Conditioning: Syrian Beehive Houses](#)

Houses in North America all look alike; you can find the same gablegable or faux chateau style from Calgary to Tuscon. But before thermostats, people designed to suit the climate, and did a damn fine job of it. Justin at Materialicious points us to a wonderful site, eartharchitecture.org, where I learned about Syrian beehive houses.

[Harrabin's Notes: Breaking the jam](#)

The Kyoto process has failed to deliver meaningful reductions in emissions and the Copenhagen climate meeting is doomed to failure.

The only solution is to abandon the cap-and-trade approach, re-frame climate change as an energy issue rather than a "green" issue, and persuade governments to invest massively in clean technology to provide increasing energy in a way that protects the climate.

[Gas Glut May Grow as XTO, Devon Defy Slump With Gains in Output](#)

(Bloomberg) -- The largest U.S. natural-gas producers may be doing too well at the wellhead for their own good, pumping so much of the heating and power-plant fuel that prices won't soon recover from last year's market collapse.

XTO Energy Inc. and Devon Energy Corp., two of the five largest producers of U.S. gas, yesterday reported record output and smaller declines in earnings than analysts estimated. Anadarko Petroleum Corp., London-based BP Plc and Chesapeake Energy Corp. previously reported second-quarter output gains that helped them beat estimates.

Even as they lament a gas glut, the companies have been reluctant to let revenue and profits fall further in the short term by being the first to curtail output. Second-quarter production at Fort Worth, Texas-based XTO jumped 32 percent, and Devon of Oklahoma City had a 12 percent gain.

[Iran Poised to Reduce Oil Prices for First Time in Four Months](#)

(Bloomberg) -- National Iranian Oil Co. is set to reduce the official selling price for its main Iranian Light crude oil supplied to Asia for the first time in four months, after Saudi Arabia cut prices yesterday.

Iran's state-owned oil company will set Iranian Light for September at 9 cents a barrel above the average of Persian Gulf benchmarks Oman and Dubai grades, based on a quarterly formula tied to prices set by Saudi Arabian Oil Co. The premium will be down \$1.75, or 95 percent, from August and will be the smallest in seven months.

[Petrobras Probe Starts as Gabrielli Faces 'Crisis'](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Petroleo Brasileiro SA, struggling to meet output targets and finance a \$174 billion spending plan, faces a new challenge today as Brazil's Senate probes claims it evaded taxes and funneled cash to government allies.

The investigation, prompted by opponents of Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, focuses on allegations Rio de Janeiro-based Petrobras evaded 4.4 billion reais (\$2.4 billion) of taxes, overpaid for goods and may have favored the president's supporters when it made charitable donations. Chief Executive Officer Jose Sergio Gabrielli denies the claims.

[Lukoil Said to Obtain \\$1.2 Billion of Foreign Loans](#)

(Bloomberg) -- OAO Lukoil, Russia's second-biggest oil company, signed \$1.2 billion of

loans with 12 overseas banks, according to two people with knowledge of the deal.

The three-year deal makes Lukoil one of just seven Russian companies to borrow from foreign lenders this year, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. The nation's borrowers raised \$9.5 billion in foreign loans in 2009, down from \$46 billion in the same period last year, as Russia's first economic contraction in a decade prompted banks to freeze lending.

[Oil Set for New High in 2009, Barclays Says: Technical Analysis](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Crude oil is set to rise above \$74 a barrel in New York, passing this year's high, after prices formed an "inside bar" pattern, according to technical analysts at Barclays Capital.

The highest and lowest prices on Aug. 4 were within the trading range of the previous day, a formation on a candlestick chart known as an "inside bar" that usually indicates the continuation of a price trend, Barclays analyst MacNeil Curry said in a telephone interview from New York yesterday. A narrowing gap between monthly contracts of Brent crude and a "positive macro backdrop" lend support, he said.

[Canadian Natural Reports Profit on Alberta Oil Sands](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Canadian Natural Resources Ltd., the nation's second-largest natural-gas producer, reported a second- quarter profit after production started at its Horizon oil-sands project in northeastern Alberta and raised its output forecast.

[Gazprom Will Ship Gas to Asia in Bid to Curb Reliance on Europe](#)

(Bloomberg) -- OAO Gazprom, the world's biggest natural-gas producer, plans to start piping East Siberian gas to Asia, where an increase in demand over the next 20 years may outpace growth in its traditional European markets.

Gazprom will send surplus gas east from the Yakutia fields, Deputy Chief Executive Officer Alexander Ananenko said last week at a ceremony in the eastern town of Khabarovsk, as work began on a new pipeline to the Pacific Ocean.

[Report urges separation of science and state](#)

Science and politics mix badly, a bipartisan report said Wednesday. It called for changes to federal agencies and expert panels to keep the subjects apart.

The "Science for Policy Project," headed by the former House Science Committee chief Sherwood Boehlert, a retired Republican from New York, and Don Kennedy, former editor of *Science*, suggests conflict over stem cells, climate and other science "has left the U.S. with a system that is plagued by charges that science is being 'politicized.'"

For example, President Bush's decision in 2001 not to sign a climate treaty on economic grounds inflamed charges that science was being ignored. The discovery that a Bush administration lawyer had edited climate science summaries (critics argued he softened the certainty of global warming) in 2005 further alarmed scientists.

[Adonis defends high-speed rail plan](#)

The transport secretary, Lord Adonis, hit back at airline industry criticism of his high-speed rail plan today as he accused the Ryanair boss, Michael O'Leary, of having his "head in the sand" over the competitive threat posed by 250mph trains.

Adonis rejected claims by O'Leary that investing billions in high-speed rail in the UK to replace short-haul flights would be "insane". O'Leary told the Guardian there would still be heavy demand to travel by air between the UK and Europe because the Channel tunnel is the only rail link between Britain and the continent.

[For Panama Canal, a new era of trade is coming](#)

How much of an impact the bigger, better canal will have on global trade patterns remains to be seen. Roughly 65% of the goods sailing through the canal go to or from U.S. shores, and American ports and rail yards that compete with the canal will fight to retain as much business as they can. Cargo from Asia, for example, can reach U.S. markets either via the canal or by docking at a West Coast port and riding rail lines to inland destinations.

Shippers must balance myriad factors — fuel costs, type of cargo, time and distance — in calculating the best route for individual shipments. "It's possible to reach Chicago a lot of different ways," says Paul Bingham, managing director of global commerce and transportation for IHS Global Insight.

But Peter Keller, president at NYK Line, says the expanded canal will send a seismic shock through the business of transporting goods around the globe. Among the fallout: construction of larger vessels for bulk cargo, such as iron ore, and a tougher climate for American dockworkers seeking pay raises.

[Arctic Ocean may be polluted soup by 2070](#)

WITHIN 60 years the Arctic Ocean could be a stagnant, polluted soup. Without drastic cuts in greenhouse-gas emissions, the Transpolar Drift, one of the Arctic's most powerful currents and a key disperser of pollutants, is likely to disappear because of global warming.

[Baby emissions fuel global warming](#)

Estimates of the carbon legacy of bringing a child into the world suggest that the green choice may be to stop at two kids.

[Carbon credits won't work: economist](#)

QUEBEC -- Carbon credits -- to package and trade offsets to greenhouse gas emissions - - won't work, says McGill University economist Christopher Green.

"This cure could be worse than the disease," says Mr. Green, rejecting the argument of Premier Jean Charest, who wants the Montreal Exchange to be the carbon market for all of Canada.

As an alternative to Charest's "cap and trade" proposal for carbon credits, Mr. Green proposes a carbon tax.

[Canada: Coping with American cap-and-trade systems](#)

"We're seeing ever-increasing signs that what happens here will reflect what happens in the U. S. more closely than previously believed," said Adam Chamberlain of Borden Ladner Gervais in Toronto. "Government sources have told me that both the provincial and federal governments are doing their best to work with the Americans."

What is known is that the federal government, which has issued a draft carbon-offset plan for public comment, has sought consultations with the Americans on a North American cap-and-trade system. "The government's going to have to come up with some method of creating a marketplace that works inside and outside the country," Mr. Chamberlain said.

[Air conditioners cut out ozone-depleting gas under new rules](#)

With an estimated 4 million air conditioners likely to fail this summer in the USA, deciding whether to spend the money on a new system is going to be a common predicament.

What isn't so well-known is that early next year, a government-required shift in what air-conditioning and heat pump systems use to regulate temperature will take effect.

[Peeing in the shower: the rules](#)

New television advertisements in Brazil are encouraging people to pee in the shower as a way of conserving water.

[Amazon deforestation speeds up: Brazil space agency](#)

Deforestation in Brazil's Amazon rainforest in June was four times more devastating than the month before, further depleting what is seen as one of the biggest buffers against global warming, official data revealed Tuesday.

Satellite imagery analyzed by Brazil's National Institute for Space Research showed 578 square kilometers (223 square miles) of Amazon woodland was burned or cut down.

That was more than four times the devastation recorded in May, and roughly equivalent to the size of Switzerland's Lake Geneva, or half the area of California's biggest city of Los Angeles.

[Limits on Speculative Trading Needed to Protect Energy Markets, U.S. Regulator Says](#)

WASHINGTON — The chairman of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission said on Wednesday that the agency wanted to impose new restrictions on so-called speculative traders, not to reduce price volatility but to prevent the energy markets from being dominated by a few huge investment funds.

“I believe that at the core of promoting market integrity is ensuring markets do not become too concentrated,” said Gary G. Gensler, the commission chairman. “I think we would all agree that if one party controls half the market, that party is more likely to lessen liquidity than enhance it.”

[Oil Prices to Heat Up Slowly](#)

Looking beyond 2012, questions of capacity haunt the analysis -- not the old "peak oil" scares of last year but the more prosaic issues of maintenance. The declines in price and demand during the past year have already put much exploration on hold, delayed development spending, and discontinued several projects.

Cash-strapped Russia, in particular, has cut out just about all exploration, though recently Moscow did invite Royal Dutch Shell to participate in new leasing in the Sakhalin Island development. Even more significant, perhaps, is that Russia has neglected the maintenance of existing fields, which will limit the draw from those fields for years to come.

[Qatar Cuts July Crude Oil Prices on Weak Asian Demand](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Qatar Petroleum, which exports most of its crude oil output to Asia, reduced July official selling prices, reflecting weak demand for grades usually refined for middle distillates such as diesel.

[Qatar to Supply Full September Crude Oil Volume, Refiners Say](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Qatar Petroleum, which exported crude oil only to Asia in the past two years, will ship full volume under term contracts in September, refining officials said.

The state-owned company will maintain supply for a second month, said officials at two refineries that hold one-year contracts, asking not to be identified because of confidentiality agreements with the supplier.

[Chavez bans Ecopetrol from Orinoco](#)

Colombian state-run Ecopetrol will not have any role in developing Venezuela's oil-rich Orinoco Belt, President Hugo Chavez said.

"Nothing," Chavez told reporters late yesterday when asked what role Ecopetrol would have in developing the region, where Venezuela is studying reserves that it says will add up to more than 200 billion barrels.

"Zero," he said in a Bloomberg report.

[ExxonMobil: Green Company of the Year](#)

Oil from algae? Just a sideshow. Exxon's real thrust into green energy is a big bet on natural gas.

[Lawmakers reach \\$2B 'clunkers' deal](#)

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate reached a deal on saving the dwindling "cash for clunkers" program late Wednesday, agreeing to vote on a plan that would add \$2 billion to the popular rebate program and give car shoppers until Labor Day to trade in their gas-guzzlers for a new ride.

[Nigeria oil rebels amnesty offer starts Thursday](#)

ABUJA (Reuters) - Niger Delta militants are expected to start turning in their arms at collection centers on Thursday when an unconditional pardon offered by President Umaru Yar'Adua begins, the amnesty committee said.

Yar'Adua offered a 60-day amnesty to gunmen on June 24, in an effort to stem unrest in the oil-producing delta region which has prevented Nigeria from pumping much above two-thirds of its oil capacity.

Attacks have cost the world's eighth-biggest exporter billions of dollars a year in lost revenues.

[Toyota Prius top-selling car in Japan for 3 months](#)

TOKYO — Toyota's hugely popular Prius hybrid ranked as Japan's top-selling car in July, clinching the spot for the third consecutive month as tax breaks boosted sales of green vehicles, an auto industry group said Thursday.

[Venezuela: Socialism for the 21st Century](#)

Oil prices have begun to rise again in spring 2009 and given the continued global demand for oil and that we are reaching peak oil production, oil prices are likely to grow rapidly again in the future. This will provide Venezuelawith plenty of oil revenue.

Foreign exchange from growing exports of natural gas will also increase. The challenge for Venezuela is to use oil and natural gas revenue to diversify the economy in order to attain food and production sovereignty in an economy not dominated by private capital and where workers and communities run the economy. Hopefully these oil and gas revenues will also fund the development of appropriate technologies for domestic production, perhaps in joint ventures with other Latin American countries. This development of appropriate technologies is necessary for the development and diversification of local industry and production that hopefully are environmentally conscious.

[How Is America Going To End?](#)

If and when America expires, we probably won't agree on the cause of death. For proof that autopsies of empires are inconclusive, consider the case of Alexander Demandt, the German historian who set out in the 1980s to collect every theory ever given for why Rome fell. The final tally: 210, including attacks by nomads on horseback, blood poisoning, decline of Nordic character, homosexuality, outflow of gold, and vaingloriousness.

In tribute to Demandt, I've gone looking for every possible reason why America could fall. I've paged through the work of scholars who have studied the characteristics of declining and failed societies. I also collected theories from futurists, doomsayers, separatists, economists, political scientists, national security experts, climatologists, geologists, astronomers, and a few miscellaneous crazy people. The result: a collection of 144 potential causes of America's future death.

[‘The Great Squeeze’ joins long list of doomsaying eco-films](#)

Our planet's supply of safe drinking water is rapidly diminishing. We have reached peak oil (according to some experts). The polar ice caps are melting, causing sea levels to rise and threatening coastal areas and island nations everywhere.

The Great Squeeze, a documentary by director Christophe Fauchere (of 2007's film Energy Crossroads), is full of such apocalyptic observations, none of which should surprise anyone even vaguely environmentally-minded.

[UK: Ban sales of poorly insulated homes, says Energy Saving Trust](#)

Owners of poorly insulated homes should not be allowed to sell or rent them until they have invested in energy efficiency measures, the Government's advisory body on domestic energy use says.

The Energy Saving Trust said that the 5.5 million homes in the lowest two bands for energy performance — more than a fifth of all homes — should also be subject to higher council tax bills and additional stamp duty. It believes that tough measures will be needed to achieve the Government's target of reducing carbon dioxide emissions from home heating by 29 per cent by 2020 and to "almost zero" by 2050.

[Garden tour to explore local produce](#)

"It's going to be harder to grow food when there's less oil and it costs more to transport it," Mueller said, noting the pressures of climate change and peak oil.

"Everybody's style is really different. We can learn from each other," she said.

Mueller said the garden tour is a way of getting people together and doing something positive on these issues. "It's what I do in my work life and home life," said Mueller.

[Zoning change eyed after N.D. coal projects blocked](#)

Officials in southwestern North Dakota say they will consider changing a zoning rule that could block development of a coal mine, a coal drying plant and a synthetic gas factory.

The rule allows any landowner within 200 feet of a proposed zoning change to block any rezoning. When it was approved in the early 1980s, its drafters probably intended to require that neighbors be notified of any zoning proposal, rather than give them power to stop it, said Tom Henning, the Stark County state's attorney.

[Hunger hits Detroit's middle class](#)

DETROIT (CNNMoney.com) -- On a side street in an old industrial neighborhood, a delivery man stacks a dolly of goods outside a store. Ten feet away stands another man clad in military fatigues, combat boots and what appears to be a flak jacket. He looks straight out of Baghdad. But this isn't Iraq. It's southeast Detroit, and he's there to guard the groceries.

"No pictures, put the camera down," he yells. My companion and I, on a tour of how people in this city are using urban farms to grow their own food, speed off.

In this recession-racked town, the lack of food is a serious problem. It's a theme that comes up again and again in conversations in Detroit. There isn't a single major chain supermarket in the city, forcing residents to buy food from corner stores. Often less healthy and more expensive food.

[Battle Brewing Over Giant Desert Solar Farm](#)

Tessera Solar plans to plant 34,000 solar dishes — each one 40 feet high and 38 feet wide — on 8,230 acres of the Mojave Desert in Southern California.

Although the lengthy licensing process for the Calico solar farm remains in the early stages, several environmental groups are already raising red flags about the massive project's impact on such protected wildlife as the desert tortoise, the Mojave fringe-toed lizard and Nelson's bighorn sheep.

[Spanish region to scrap 2.3 GW wind power plan](#)

MADRID (Reuters) - Spain's north-westerly region of Galicia will scrap a 2.3 gigawatt wind power plan involving contracts for Gas Natural, Acciona and Italy's Enel, a local government spokesman said on Wednesday.

The project, which was criticised by some of Spain's power utilities when it was approved by the previous local government in 2008 after most of the contracts went to local companies, had been drawn up by Galicia's previous government.

[Hawaiian Electric to seek new bids from biofuel suppliers](#)

Hawaiian Electric Co.'s new \$137 million generator at Campbell Industrial Park has been completed, but won't be providing electricity to HECO customers until the utility can find a new supplier for the renewable biodiesel it will burn.

[Fumes from rotting seaweed on France's northern beaches could kill](#)

Holidaymakers have been told to keep away from beaches in northern France covered in seaweed after doctors gave warning that it could give off lethal fumes when it rots.

A stretch of beach had to be closed after a horse rider lost consciousness as a result of the putrefying algae. His horse was killed. Local residents have also been treated in hospital.

The incident was in Brittany, where green seaweed is spreading across the region's beaches as nitrates pollute the water supply as a result of intensive agriculture.

[Psychology is to blame for humans not acting on climate change, psychologists say](#)

PolarIf you ever wondered what is to blame for the world's sluggish reaction to climate change, wonder no longer. The American Psychological Assn. has concluded in a 225-page report that the culprit is...

...human behavior.

[China negotiator optimistic on climate treaty](#)

BEIJING – China's top climate envoy said Wednesday he is optimistic that upcoming negotiations will produce a new treaty to fight global warming, but said developed countries have slowed the process by not setting emission-reduction targets.

The nature of global warming means the cost of failure is too high, Yu Qingtai told a news conference.

[China Balks at Greenhouse-Gas Capture Costs in Climate Battle](#)

(Bloomberg) -- China, the world's biggest carbon- dioxide polluter, is balking at the cost and effectiveness of extracting greenhouse gases from hundreds of coal plants and storing them underground.

China can achieve larger emissions cuts instead by spending money improving the energy efficiency of buildings and vehicles and investing in alternative power sources such as wind and solar, said Su Wei, director-general of the climate-change unit at China's National Development and Reform Commission.

[Pacific islands survival 'depends on climate deal'](#)

CAIRNS, Australia (AFP) – The survival of some of the world's most vulnerable Pacific nations depends on world leaders taking action to cut greenhouse gas emissions, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said Thursday.

[Permafrost Could Be Climate's Ticking Time Bomb](#)

Permafrost, or frozen ground, covers approximately 20 to 25 percent of the land-surface area in the northern hemisphere, and is estimated to contain up to 1,600 gigatons of carbon, primarily in the form of organic matter. (One gigaton is equivalent to 1 billion tons.)

By comparison, the atmosphere now contains around 850 gigatons of the element as carbon dioxide.

"Permafrost historically has served as a carbon sink, largely isolating carbon from participating in the carbon cycle," says Jacobson, whose research is funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. "However, global warming could transform the Arctic into a new carbon source by accelerating the rate of permafrost melting. This undoubtedly would have a dramatic effect on the global carbon cycle."

Jacobson says the key concern is that permafrost carbon will oxidize to carbon dioxide as melting accelerates, causing a positive feedback to global warming. A vicious cycle is created as a warmer climate facilitates more carbon release, which in turn favors more warming.



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