



## Drumbeat: August 17, 2011

Posted by [Leanan](#) on August 17, 2011 - 9:17am

### [OPEC's Crude Exports Increase 2% in June, Led by Saudi Shipments](#)

Exports of crude oil by OPEC member countries rose 2 percent in June after Saudi Arabia boosted shipments by 7.9 percent, according to data supplied to the Joint Organization Data Initiative.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries shipped 22.54 million barrels a day in June, up from 22.11 million in May, according to data posted today on the website. The association is supervised by the Riyadh-based International Energy Forum and compiles data from primary sources.

### [Shell: 660 Tons Of Oil Remain In Leaking Pipeline In North Sea](#)

LONDON -(Dow Jones)- Some 660 tons of oil is still inside a leaking Royal Dutch Shell PLC pipeline in the U.K. North Sea, the Anglo-Dutch major said Wednesday, explaining that efforts to stop the relatively light flow of crude oil are taking a long time so as to minimize the risk of the remaining oil spilling out.

Shell has been attempting to stop a leaking flowline from its Gannet Alpha platform for the last seven days amid mounting public criticism of its perceived lack of transparency about the spill.

### [Statoil Pleads Guilty To Improper Water Use At Oil-Sands Project](#)

CALGARY -(Dow Jones)- Statoil ASA (STO) pleaded guilty to charges related to improper water use at its oil-sands leases in northern Alberta, the company said Wednesday.

Norway's state-owned oil and gas company, which operates the Kai Kos Dehseh parcel of steam-injection oil-sands projects, faces 19 charges related to improper water use, as well as providing false and misleading information about water withdrawals from natural water sources.

### [Environmentalists Fume At Fracking Talk In Energy Committee](#)

Oilfield services players such as Halliburton, Schlumberger and Baker Hughes will rest easier following the recommendations in the draft report prepared by the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board. Rather than coming down on the dangers of fracking, it highlighted the importance of adopting best practices in the fracking process to avoid environmental risks and advised more disclosure from the industry on the composition of fracking fluids and procedures.

This came as a disappointing blow to some environmentalists who have been pushing for a complete ban of the process citing environmental and health hazards.

### [Petrobras CFO Says Brazil Forces Maintenance After BP Spill](#)

Brazilian regulators are forcing state-controlled Petroleo Brasileiro SA (PETR4) to shut production equipment more frequently for maintenance after BP Plc's Gulf of Mexico oil spill, the company's chief financial officer said.

### [U.S. ethanol production drops, snaps four-week rise](#)

(Reuters) - U.S. ethanol production slipped in the last week as profit margins narrowed and domestic demand waned, snapping a four-week rise in output.

### [High gas prices boost online sales](#)

As higher gasoline prices cut into cash-strapped American consumers' budgets, some have decided to take the money they save by not driving and shopping online.

That has prompted retailers — from global giant Walmart to online pioneer Amazon.com — to invest heavily in expanded operations to better capture Web-based sales.

### [Textile industry: 'Give me electricity or I will move to Bangladesh'](#)

FAISALABAD: Faced with a chronic energy crisis in Pakistan, many textile manufacturers in Faisalabad — the country's textile hub — are voting with their feet and moving their manufacturing units to Bangladesh.

### [Fuel shortage will cripple India's power plans: Deloitte](#)

India's plans for growth in electricity supply are almost certain to be derailed by lack of fuel. The poor financial health of power distribution companies will exacerbate the problem, says global consultancy firm Deloitte Touche & Tohmatsu.

The lack of electricity is crippling India's ambitious economic growth programmes. Already grappling with a severe power supply deficit, the country's planners have

projected a capacity addition of over 50,000 MW in the ongoing 11th five-year plan (2007-12). However, this is increasingly looking like an impossible target.

### [Analysis: On a clear day you may soon see a rig off Virginia](#)

(Reuters) - Fifty miles off the coast of Virginia is a sliver of ocean the shape of a pizza slice and home to at least 130 million barrels of oil and more than a trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

A previously scuttled plan to drill in these waters offshore Virginia Beach has resurfaced and could get the green light at a time when an election-minded Obama administration is trying to salvage its credentials as worthy guardian of the U.S. economy.

### [Renewable energy zealots must understand 'Net Energy'](#)

My critics fail to understand the concept of "net energy," a full accounting of the energy inputs required to produce a given unit of energy. Renewable energy requires far more inputs of energy, materials and money than do fossil fuels per equivalent unit of energy produced, recent research shows. Especially challenging will be finding a liquid fuel and feedstock alternative to oil, which powers close to 100 percent of global transportation and is ubiquitous in consumer products. No other fuel is as energy-dense, versatile, easily-transportable and abundant as oil. It is the main fuel powering a globalized industrialized civilization and will do so just once.

### [The most dangerous machine ever built](#)

Are you a hypocrite if you criticize personal cars but yet own your own car? Do you have to achieve total transportation purity -- relying only on transit, bicycling or hoofing it -- to earn the right to open your mouth on all the problems that the automotive industrial complex has caused, from accident deaths and suburban sprawl to climate change and oil wars?

Thank goodness, no.

### ['Cool congregations': The Interfaith Power & Light story, part 2](#)

With a model of distributed generation of energy, lower carbon footprint and renewable energy the Interfaith Power & Light vision points to a different model of security and helps us to break our addiction to fossil fuel, which brings such harm to God's good earth and to future generations, and pulls us out of the peak oil conundrum.

### [Sharon Astyk: Picturing World Agriculture](#)

This is important because after more than 60 years of industrialization in agriculture, after globalization and expansion of every kind, much of the world's food is still grown on tiny family farms that would have looked very familiar to our ancestors a century or even a millennium ago. When we debate the relative merits of "organic" versus "conventional" agriculture, we ignore the fact that half the world's food is grown by farmers who use largely organic methods – mostly because that's what they can afford.

### [The Cause Of Riots And The Price of Food](#)

What causes riots? That's not a question you would expect to have a simple answer.

But today, Marco Lagi and buddies at the New England Complex Systems Institute in Cambridge, say they've found a single factor that seems to trigger riots around the world.

This single factor is the price of food. Lagi and co say that when it rises above a certain threshold, social unrest sweeps the planet.

### [Drought so far cost Texas farms record \\$5.2 billion](#)

LUBBOCK, Texas — The blistering drought in Texas has caused an estimated \$5.2 billion in crop and livestock losses so far this agricultural season, a record figure likely to rise further, state officials said Wednesday.

### [Bill McKibben: A watershed moment for Obama on climate change](#)

Ain't eBay grand? For \$10 you can buy a sack of 50 assorted Obama '08 buttons, and that's what I've been doing. If you look closely, you might see them this weekend on the lapels of some of the global warming protesters holding a sit-in outside the White House.

Already, more than a thousand people have signed up to be arrested over two weeks beginning Aug. 20 — the biggest display of civil disobedience in the environmental movement in decades and one of the largest nonviolent direct actions since the World Trade Organization demonstrations in Seattle back before Sept. 11. (Among the first 500 to sign up, the biggest cohort was born in the Truman administration, followed closely by FDR babies and Eisenhower kids. These seniors contradict the stereotype of greedy geezers who care only about their own future.)

### [The military's war on oil: For the military clean energy saves lives](#)

NEW YORK (CNNMoney) -- One out of eight U.S. Army casualties in Iraq was the result of protecting fuel convoys.

This is a powerful incentive for the military to move away from oil and toward renewable energy, and that's exactly what it's doing.

From experimental solar-powered desert bases for the Marines to Navy robots that run on wave energy, the military is quickly becoming a leading buyer of cutting-edge renewable energy technology.

### [\*The true cost of the military's oil addiction\*](#)

### [Companies paid more for food, goods in July](#)

The overall PPI, which measures price changes in goods before they reach the consumer, rose 0.2 percent last month, the Labor Department said Wednesday. That follows a 0.4 percent drop in June, the first decline in 17 months.

Gas prices fell for the second straight month. Food costs rose 0.6 percent, the biggest rise since February.

The jump in the core index is unlikely to continue, economists said. One reason is that raw material prices are increasing at a slower pace than the finished goods tracked by the PPI.

### [Shell proposes Platts delay Brent oil changes to 2013](#)

LONDON (Reuters) - Royal Dutch Shell, one of the biggest participants in North Sea Brent crude trading, wants proposed changes to the way the market works to be delayed by a year to minimize disruption.

Oil price assessment service Platts, a unit of McGraw Hill, proposed in July to tweak the way it calculates its dated Brent price -- a benchmark used to price crude cargoes around the world -- as of January 2012.

### [Petrobras to import 630,000 barrels gasoline in Aug](#)

RIO DE JANEIRO (Reuters) - Brazilian state oil company Petrobras will import 630,000 barrels of gasoline this month, supply director Paulo Roberto Costa said on Wednesday.

The director said imports of gasoline by the company have totaled 3.15 million barrels so far in 2011, including the most recent volumes expected in August.

### [Three firms bid to build Iraq gas power plant](#)

(Reuters) - Iraq has received bids by three foreign companies to build a 1,014 megawatt gas power plant north of Baghdad, the Electricity Ministry said on Wednesday.

### [Syrian regime: Troops get rid of 'terrorist groups' in 2 cities](#)

(CNN) -- Syrian troops left the embattled eastern city of Deir Ezzor after "ridding the city of the armed terrorist groups," government-run media reported Wednesday.

The claim came shortly after another report that security forces "completed their mission" in the Ramel neighborhood of Latakia and were pulling out after "putting an end to the armed terrorist groups who terrified the safe citizens by their criminal acts," according to the Syrian Arab News Agency.

### [States mull taxing drivers by the mile](#)

A number of regulators and planners think the idea of charging by the mile is a great idea — something that could gain even more traction if electric propulsion grows in popularity. Since hybrids use less fuel than comparable conventionally powered vehicles and battery-electric vehicles use no fuel at all, there's the potential for government coffers to lose billions of dollars a year in annual revenues used for road maintenance and other projects.

To replace those revenues, several states — along with a number of European countries — are exploring the idea of establishing per-mile fees that would use GPS navigation systems to track how much a vehicle is driven. There could be a fixed-rate charge or the fee might be adjusted to reflect the fuel-efficiency of a vehicle, perhaps even when and where it was driven.

### [Yes, your commute is bad for you too](#)

The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index recently asked commuters how they felt about their lives, emotional health, work environment and overall health. And how long it took them to get to the work.

The results, in general: The longer you are in that car, or train, or bus (or walking we suppose), the worse off you are.

### [Silicon Valley billionaire funding creation of artificial libertarian islands](#)

Pay Pal founder and early Facebook investor Peter Thiel has given \$1.25 million to an initiative to create floating libertarian countries in international waters, according to a profile of the billionaire in Details magazine.

Thiel has been a big backer of the Seasteading Institute, which seeks to build sovereign nations on oil rig-like platforms to occupy waters beyond the reach of law-of-the-sea treaties. The idea is for these countries to start from scratch--free from the laws, regulations, and moral codes of any existing place. Details says the experiment would be



"a kind of floating petri dish for implementing policies that libertarians, stymied by indifference at the voting booths, have been unable to advance: no welfare, looser building codes, no minimum wage, and few restrictions on weapons."

### [A Beltway boost for EVs](#)

Environmentalists, gutsy entrepreneurs, and automakers stressing about fuel economy standards often drive the push for electric vehicles.

But in Washington, a very different group is quietly moving federal policy toward vehicle electrification. Securing America's Future Energy, a group little known outside the Beltway but highly influential within it, sees petroleum dependence as a critical national security issue.

Last month SAFE held a war-game simulation, Oil ShockWave, in which former government officials, military leaders, and cabinet members tried to deal with sharply rising oil prices and the resulting political instability.

### [Oil Climbs in New York as U.S. Fuel Supply Drop Signals Increased Demand](#)

Oil advanced from a two-day low in New York as investors bet that shrinking fuel stockpiles in the U.S. indicate demand will increase in the world's biggest crude-consuming nation.

Futures rose as much as 1.6 percent before an Energy Department report today that may say crude and gasoline stockpiles fell last week. The industry-funded American Petroleum Institute said yesterday gasoline supplies slid the most in almost five months. Inventories typically shrink in summer amid the May-to-September peak driving season.

### [Shell Under Fire Over Silent Tactics](#)

Oil has been flowing into the North Sea from a leak at a platform off the coast of Scotland for a week, but Shell has failed to be open with the public. Details of the leak are scarce, and information on the amount of oil which has escaped so far remains uncertain.

### [Oil spill exposes Shell's ticking timebomb](#)

For Shell, the timing of a spill at its Gannet A facility in the UK North Sea couldn't have been worse. For months, it has been selling its reputation as a responsible and cutting-edge oil company in its bid to drill in the Beaufort Sea in the US Arctic – and it recently won approval.

The Gannet Alpha platform spill and a damning report by the UN, undermining Shell's

PR strategy. The company has been castigated over its lack of transparency in reporting the leak and for downplaying its magnitude and potential impacts. We now know that the spill is the single largest in UK waters in the last 10 years. While the spill is unlikely to approach the devastating impacts of the Deepwater Horizon disaster, its significance lies in the fact that it took place under the much vaunted "gold standard" regulatory regime of the UK and by a company that has been trading on its reputation as a responsible corporate citizen.

### [China mulls lawsuit over Bohai Bay oil spill](#)

SHANGHAI (AP) — China's oceanic administration says it is preparing to sue the local unit of ConocoPhillips for damages to the environment resulting from offshore oil spills that began in June.

### [Peru's Humala May Curb Gas Exports to Mexico as Growth Boosts Local Demand](#)

Peruvian President Ollanta Humala will consider cutting natural gas exports to Mexico as demand from local power plants and petrochemical projects surges, according to the president of the state oil contracting agency.

### [Venezuela, Iran seek to boost dialogue within OPEC](#)

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — The presidents of Venezuela and Iran have agreed to work together within OPEC as economic concerns weigh on world oil prices, the Venezuelan government said Tuesday.

President Hugo Chavez spoke with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad by telephone Monday, and the two agreed on the need to coordinate more closely in OPEC, Venezuela's Foreign Ministry said. It cited the "ominous effects of the crisis in the dominant powers' economies."

### [Angola Exceeds the Country's Oil Production in July - OPEC](#)

Lagos — Angola over took Nigeria in July crude production, the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) said at the weekend stating that the cumulative exports of its member reached its highest in about two years.

The 12- member organization, which stated this in its July reports maintained that its crude oil output rose by 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) in the month and reached 30.05 million mbpd, its highest since December 2008.

### [Norway Sees Longer Oil Era as North Sea Find Offers Hidden Giant](#)



Norway may slow a decade-long slump in oil production after a series of discoveries from the Arctic to the North Sea.

Statoil ASA has made two offshore finds of more than 250 million barrels of oil equivalent in Norway this year. The country's biggest oil and gas producer yesterday said Aldous Major South and Avaldsnes in the North Sea are part of one "giant" oil field, and among Norway's top 10 discoveries. The discovery is less than 10 feet away from where Total SA, then Elf Aquitaine, drilled a dry well in 1971, according to Statoil.

### [China's July Coal Imports Rise 36% on Summer Power Shortages, Sxcoal Says](#)

China's July coal imports climbed 36 percent to 17.53 million metric tons from a year earlier, sxcoal.com, a Shanxi-based industry portal, said on its website, citing Chinese customs data.

That exceeded the customs bureau's record of 17.34 million tons in December and 13.73 million tons in June. The official customs data is due to be released Aug. 22.

### [Special report: Pension scandal shakes up Venezuelan oil giant](#)

CARACAS (Reuters) - Venezuela received an enviable honor last month: OPEC said it is sitting on the biggest reserves of crude oil in the world -- even more than Saudi Arabia.

But the Venezuelan oil industry is also sitting atop a well of trouble.

The South American nation has struggled to take advantage of its bonanza of expanding reserves. And a scandal over embezzled pension funds at state oil company PDVSA has renewed concerns about corruption and mismanagement.

### [Foes file new petition to block Exxon megaloads](#)

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Opponents of Exxon Mobil Corp.'s plans to ship massive oil refinery modules across a north central Idaho highway are asking the state's transportation chief once again to reject a hearing officer's findings in the disputed case.

A petition filed Monday with the Idaho Transportation Department alleges more than three dozen flaws in the formal recommendation submitted on the case by hearing officer Duff McKee in June.

### [Syrian tanks shell Latakia, death toll reaches 36](#)

AMMAN (Reuters) - Syrian tanks fired on low-income Sunni Muslim districts in the port city of Latakia on Tuesday, the fourth day of an assault which has killed 36 people

and forced thousands of Palestinian refugees to flee, activists said.

A senior Palestinian official described the military offensive in the city as "a crime against humanity," adding to Arab condemnation of President Bashar al-Assad's crackdown on popular demonstrations calling for his overthrow.

### [Libyan rebels battle Gadhafi forces for control of key oil refinery in Zawiya, near Tripoli](#)

ZAWIYA, Libya — Rebels battled Moammar Gadhafi loyalists for control over Libya's only functioning oil refinery in the western city of Zawiya Wednesday, as the opposition tried to cut off fuel supplies to the regime's stronghold of Tripoli.

### [Japan's Hokkaido Elec gets approval for restarted reactor](#)

TOKYO (Reuters) - Japan's Hokkaido Electric Power Co won local backing on Wednesday for commercial operation of a nuclear reactor that has been operating in a grey zone, removing uncertainty over its status as Japan weighs the need for a steady supply of electricity against worries over the safety of atomic power.

### [Oman to test solar power in oilfield production](#)

Oman is become the first country in the region to use the sun's energy to coax oil from the ground.

### [Plans advance for embattled Montana power line](#)

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — A Canadian energy company said Tuesday that it is buying an embattled Montana power transmission line project that has seen its plans of shipping wind energy across the border become mired in landowner disputes. Alberta-based Enbridge Inc.'s announcement came the same day the company announced a significant settlement with a leader of the opposition.

### [Mass. solar energy company files for bankruptcy](#)

BOSTON (AP) — A solar energy company that received millions of dollars in grants and tax incentives from Massachusetts before closing one of its facilities in the state has voluntarily filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy relief.

### [Tiny block of thorium could power your car forever](#)

Range is a huge concern for anyone driving an electric vehicle. The fear of running out of juice with no means to recharge is very real as charging stations aren't exactly common.

A zero-emission car technology currently being developed by Connecticut-based company, Laser Power Systems, completely eradicates this concern. In fact, if the technology ever takes off, you might never have to refuel again.

### [Toyota spent \\$1.29M on lobbying in 2Q](#)

WASHINGTON (AP) — Toyota Motor Corp. spent \$1.29 million in the second quarter lobbying on tax incentives for alternative energy vehicles, patent laws, biofuel legislation and other issues.

### [New ethanol blend raises ire of car buffs](#)

Foes of ethanol worry that E15 will become the norm in time and they won't be able to tell when they are buying it.

"The answer is not to stop this 15 percent ethanol, it's to get all of the ethanol out of gasoline," said classic-car mechanic Ed Syrocki, owner of EMS Classic Car Care in Warren, Mich.

### [White House Seeks New US Bio-Fuel Industry Not Based on Corn](#)

The White House today announced a \$510 million initiative meant to spur development of a new U.S. bio-fuel industry that utilizes non-food crops like algae or wood chips instead of the more traditional source, corn.

Officials billed the plan, a public-private partnership, as part of the administration's efforts to reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil and create new jobs in rural parts of the country.

### [Next generation Smart car family includes a Smart bike](#)

The Mercedes-Benz SmartForTwo plug-in electric car is getting a major revamp this year, and the third generation will make its debut at the Frankfurt Motor Show in September. The newest version of the tiny two-seat car will boast a motor with 47 HP nominal output and a peak of 73 HP, a top speed of 75 mph (up from 62 in the current car), and an increased range of 87 miles (up from 71).

### [Judge Rejects Groups' Effort to Remove Bike Lane](#)

A judge on Tuesday dismissed an effort by Brooklyn residents to remove a hotly contested bicycle lane installed by the city on Prospect Park West, in one of the most closely watched controversies over a signature policy of the Bloomberg administration.

## [LEYTONSTONE: Expert to give talk on financial meltdown](#)

Nicole Foss, who co-edits the Automatic Earth website, is a former fellow of the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies and a former energy policy researcher for the EU.

She blogs under the name Stoneleigh on the relationship between peak oil prices, financial markets and global security.

She will be giving a free talk at Leytonstone Social Club at 603 High Road, Leytonstone, from 7.00pm to 7.30pm on Friday, September 2.

## [Collapse scenarios – satire or vision of the future? Part 1](#)

With the US debt mountain looking increasingly unresolvable and European state debts at levels sufficient to give the markets recurrent panic attacks, the stage is nicely set for authors of collapse scenarios. Their Armageddon visions might not come to pass, but then again, given the way the marbles are rolling around, they just might. These visions are scary stuff, but usually spiced up with some decent gallows humour along the way. I will be talking about two such visions in a series of blogs. The first is by the Russian/American author, Dmitry Orlov, *Reinventing Collapse: The Soviet Experience and American Prospects*, which looks at the “coming” (in Orlov’s vision) collapse of America, which Orlov sees as curiously paralleling the demise of the USSR. The second is John Michael Greer’s *The Wealth of Nature: Economics as if Survival Mattered*, which again sees current Western economies and lifestyles as unsustainable and headed for inevitable collapse.

## [The Impending Demise of Globalism; How It Will Cripple Corporate America](#)

What poses the greatest threat to the future of globalism is called Peak Oil, a term still not very familiar to most Americans. Peak Oil is a theory which is evolving right before our eyes. The demise of globalism will begin as the world enters the era of Peak Oil, that point in time when the world’s demand for petroleum will overwhelm the production capabilities of the world’s oil producing nations. While the world will not run out of oil for a long time, the dilemma is that oil is becoming much more difficult and expensive to extract from the deposits that are rapidly declining. Not only are there no new large oil fields being discovered but the potential for new discoveries is very slight.

## [Nouriel Roubini: Is Capitalism Doomed?](#)

Karl Marx, it seems, was partly right in arguing that globalization, financial intermediation run amok, and redistribution of income and wealth from labor to capital could lead capitalism to self-destruct (though his view that socialism would be better has proved wrong). Firms are cutting jobs because there is not enough final demand. But cutting jobs reduces labor income, increases inequality, and reduces final demand.

## [Problems Will Be Global -- And Solutions Will Be, Too](#)

Before considering the world in 2025, 14 years from now, it is worth remembering the world 14 years ago, in 1997. Back then, the United States was the sole superpower, its immensity and dominance of the international system so evident as to trigger the resentful label of "hyperpower" from the French foreign minister. The American economy was expanding fast enough to leave the country a healthy and growing surplus by the end of Bill Clinton's presidency three years later. The European Union, then still only four years old, had just 15 members; the euro did not exist. The wars dominating the headlines were in Europe: Bosnia, Croatia, and, soon, Kosovo. The term BRICs -- the Goldman Sachs label attached to the fast-growing emerging markets of Brazil, Russia, India, and China -- had not yet been invented. The Internet was booming, but social media did not exist.

You get the point: A lot can change in 14 years, and rarely in ways foreseen. In the spirit of proper humility, then, here's my take on what the landscape of global diplomacy will look like a decade and a half from now:

## [Japan at critical tipping point](#)

COLCHESTER, Vermont — Japanese trains run to the minute, and the country's businesses pride themselves on energy-efficiency. The Japanese boast of their eco-services for eco-products in eco-cities. Yet they rely primarily on imported fossil fuel and nuclear power, live in energy-wasteful homes, and import 60 percent of their food. That may be changing in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Maybe.

Japan is at a crucial tipping point. As an island nation, it offers a microcosmic look at the problems facing the rest of the globe, including peak oil and climate change due to greenhouse gas emissions. And as Japan tips, so may the world.

## [One-child policy a surprising boon for China girls](#)

Since 1979, China's family planning rules have barred nearly all urban families from having a second child in a bid to stem population growth. With no male heir competing for resources, parents have spent more on their daughters' education and well-being, a groundbreaking shift after centuries of discrimination.

"They've basically gotten everything that used to only go to the boys," said Vanessa Fong, a Harvard University professor and expert on China's family planning policy.

## [Anti-baby boom: Why U.S. birth rate keeps falling](#)

The number of children born in the U.S. peaked with a record 4.3 million births in 2007, but has since fallen, dropping to 4 million births last year, according to estimates by the National Center for Health Statistics. The birth rate -- a measure of births per 1,000

people -- has dropped 10%.

Historically, declines in birth rates have gone hand in hand with economic downturns. During the financial slumps of the early 1990's and 1970's, the birth rates fell 15% and 18%, respectively. In the midst of the Great Depression, the birth rate was down by 17%.

### [Africa famine: soaring food prices intensifying crisis, report warns](#)

A volatile global food supply is deepening the humanitarian catastrophe in the Horn of Africa, the World Bank warns in a new report.

Shortages and near-historic prices for staples such as corn, wheat and sugar have magnified the impact of the drought now ravaging the Horn of Africa, the Food Price Watch report said.

### [Somali Militant Beatings Worsen Spiral of Famine as Refugees Flee Drought](#)

Abdi Hassan lies in a hospital bed in the world's biggest refugee camp recovering from a beating by tax collectors from Somalia's al-Qaeda-inspired militants who smashed his left hip and knee with rifle butts.

The 20-year-old herder refused to hand over some of his camels to the militants, known as al-Shabaab, or "the youth" in Arabic, who confiscate crops and livestock from civilians to help finance their campaign to overthrow Somalia's western-backed government. The militants generate \$70 million to \$100 million a year from taxation and extortion, the United Nations Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea estimated last month.

### [Protest Over Chemical Plant Shows Growing Pressure on China From Citizens](#)

BEIJING — More than international prestige or even economic might, the top priority of China's leadership is to maintain stability among this nation's vast and varied population. President Hu Jintao explicitly reaffirmed that goal just last month, telling a Communist Party celebration that "without stability, nothing can be accomplished."

In the aftermath of a large protest on Sunday in a major metropolis in northeast China, Dalian, that craving for rigid orderliness appears increasingly ephemeral. In the face of ever more sophisticated efforts to control and guide expression, significant protests — and visceral public shows of unhappiness with government — appear to be becoming regular features of life.

### [Analysis: Republicans turn sights on "activist" EPA](#)



WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Emboldened by their success wresting concessions from the Obama administration in debt-limit talks, House Republicans now plan an assault of similar vigor on the Environmental Protection Agency.

Republicans, backed by wealthy conservative lobbyists, are determined to stop the EPA and what they see as an activist agenda that is costing jobs and hurting corporate profits.

### [Shorelines, Sandy or Otherwise, That May Not Last](#)

Beaches that are unfettered by human infrastructure do not disappear when sea level rises. They simply move inland. When sand on a barrier island is washed into the lagoon behind it, or when the base of a beachfront cliff erodes and the bluff slumps down to the water's edge, the beach, is, in effect, moving to higher ground inland.

But, the authors conclude, unless society chooses beaches over buildings the result will be a world in which parks like the National Seashores retain natural beaches, but beach resorts elsewhere are "heavily walled and beachless." Rising seas will make sand-pumping operations "untenable," they predict, and tourists will amuse themselves by "promenading on top of a seawall" — already the principal activity in too many coastal resorts.

### [U.S. cities prepare to adapt to climate change](#)

In Chula Vista, Calif., new waterfront buildings will be required to have higher foundations because of an expected rise in sea levels.

In Chicago, where flooding is predicted to worsen, residents can get rebates for putting rain barrels, compost bins and native plants in their yards.

And in New York City, where rising tides are also projected, wastewater treatment plants will elevate their pumps.

While some members of Congress debate the scientific validity of climate change, these U.S. cities are going beyond efforts to mitigate it with lower greenhouse gas emissions. They're at the forefront of an emerging trend: adaptation.



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