

# NEWS WRAP

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Without being accompanied by elders, minors from west Asia and Africa, are rushing to Europe, via the dispersed Aegean islands of Greece. Escaping from poverty, persecution and war, children from Afghanistan and Congo walk several thousand miles, or ride on horses, or hitchhike on trucks over fields, mountains and streams in Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey. Dodging Turkish border patrols, they arrive in northern Greece, with hopes of travelling deeper into Europe. The teenagers suffer from anxiety and depression in the reception centres at Volos in northern Greece and Patras in western Greece. There are scarcely any girls amongst the children refugees. Fleeing from their own countries to avoid being drafted by either the Taliban or some ruthless militia or government forces and to avoid the hardships of poverty, the teenaged boys journey without parents or elder brothers. Between January to June 08, about 2000 school age teenagers have arrived on the shores of Greece, without valid papers, and in huge debts to traffickers.

Very seldom Greece provides asylum. With stiff asylum polices and low acceptance levels, the problems in the muddy shacks of the refugee shanty towns are accentuated by Greece's inadequate childcare system and housing facilities. About 85% of the refugee children are unaccompanied. They have been falling victim to traffickers and organized crime. The migrant children have suffered arrest and imprisonment, sometimes for up to three months. Sharing of prison cells with adult criminals is quite common. The young migrants have encountered racism and anger in Athens and in small towns. The children work to pay off smugglers.

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In the first week of June 08, world leaders presided over a summit on the global food crisis. The world has 850 million people hungry. Even though the summit addressed "the challenges of climate change and bioenergy", there was no agreement on biofuels, nor any adopted, at the expense of the malnourished. In 2006, \$11 to 12 billion of US subsidies and protective tariff policies, diverted 100 million tons of cereals from consumption by the world's population, to satisfy the demand for fuel by vehicles. No funds were allocated to prevent the annual deforestation of 13 million hectares, especially in developing countries, which possess tropical forest ecosystems functioning as carbon sinks for about 190 gigatons. On the other hand a carbon market, valued at \$64 billion, has been created. Global policy initiatives on climate change and food security favour western industrilized countries.

Opposition to the proposed slowing down of biofuels, came from USA and Brazil. Brazil and Mojam-bique defended their farmers' rights of a new source of income. As per an estimate by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), 20 to 30% of food price escalations in the past two years, is due to the development of biofuels. The US agriculture secretary claimed that corn ethanol production accounted for only 2 to 3% rise in global food prices. African nations, utilizing prime land for biofuel production, are risking food shortages, in the future.

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During 2007, Brazil's ethanol output grew by nearly a quarter, reaching a record 22 billion litres, where exports accounting for about 4 billion litres. Besides the growing arguments over "food for fuel" and rising food prices, demands from western countries for more socially acceptable work practices in the biofuel industry would reduce half a million jobs and phase out centuries of tradition in Brazil's expanding sugar-cane industry. Portuguese colonialists experimented with growing sugar-cane, since the 1520s. Now mechanization would remove the sugar-cane cutters. Switching to a tractor based system would dislocate the migrant workforce, as 80% of the 500,000 jobs would go within three years. Brazil's sugar-cane industry is marked by child labour, huge accident rates and workers' remuneration being meagre as little as \$1.35 per hour. Manual labour causes unsatisfactory environmental practices like crop wastage and the burning of stubble and leaves before cutting. A larger volume of crops would be harvested by mechanization, and by-products would be used as biomass, for powering electricity plants. The Brazilian sugar cane Industry (Unica) claims that only 1% of arable land was used for ethanol production, and believe that the Amazon region was too wet for growing sugar.

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India's Integrated Energy Policy document has projected coal demand in 2031 of around 1000 metric tons of oil equivalent (MTOE), and oil demand of almost 500 MTOE, in a scenario dominated by coal. The quantities are certainly beyond reach. A higher energy efficient scenario could reduce coal demand in 2031, to a little in excess of 750 MTOE, and oil demand stretched to 500 MTOE. Oil prices are already higher than \$130 per barrel. The Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline, being planned since 1989, has assumed a new dimension, as based on recent negotiations, the price of gas could hover to the equivalent price of imported coal, along with uncertainties which could delay the finalization of a three-country contract. The major demand for coal fuel emanates from the power sector. India's import of coal would rise substantially, given the constraints on indigenous coal production and transportation. The transport sector is the major consumer of petroleum. With oil at \$130 per barrel, the subsidy on kerosene consumed in India would exceed Rs 60,000 crores annually. In order to fill the fuel gap for large scale power generation in India, nuclear power assumes importance.

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The BJP ruled Chattisgarh state, is gearing up for state Assembly polls. The state government is constructing Atal Behari Vajpayee (former Prime Minister) Chowk in each of the 9820 villages in Chattisgarh state. Nearly 8000 Atal chowks have either been completed or near completion. All panchayats have been directed to spend Rs 20,000 for the Atal Chowks, to be debited from funds meant for basic amenities like construction of drains or hand pumps. The works include beautification of the prime spots. Panchayats under control of opposition Congress, and districts with influence of Maoist insurgents are not installing the Chowks. □□□