

Changing, Challenging Scene

Energy is a fast-rising political issue in poor and rich countries alike. Oil prices top a hundred dollars a barrel. Global warming taints coal and other fossil fuels. Biofuels are getting closer looks, including the impacts on food production and supply. Nuclear power is up for debate. Again.

Just months into 2008, the world's political leaders faced a new framework to cut global emissions of greenhouse gases. The challenging roadmap — agreed in late 2007 at the international climate change conference in Bali — would build on the Kyoto Protocol now set to expire in 2012.

"Adaptation to climate change is going to be essential," says Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which received the Nobel Peace Prize last year. "We have not done enough." Fortunately, he emphasizes, all the technologies that we need to mitigate consequences are already at hand or near it.

Feature articles in this edition take a closer look at the unfolding global scene for energy, economic and environmental development. They include interviews with Dr. Pachauri and other leaders in their fields, and reports from global and national experts tracking trends and shaping decisions.

For the IAEA, the future is busy.

In Asia and other regions, nuclear power is deep in the mix of energy plans. It's seen as a nearly carbon-free, though not risk-free, option. Issues of waste disposal, safety, and financing are being debated in up to twenty countries in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas.

At the same time, the role of other nuclear technologies and applications is being viewed through a more critical lens. The lens focuses on the safety and security of radioactive sources and nuclear materials, ranging from radioisotopes used in medicine and industry to used fuel recovered from nuclear research reactors. Valuable lessons are being passed through IAEA-supported expert missions, projects, and advisory reports. Countries are learning from each other to improve controls and minimize dangers, including those arising from illegal nuclear trafficking.

The IAEA's emphasis on helping countries to achieve a safer, cleaner environment is central to its support of actions that help them fight poverty and raise their standards of living. One regional project in the Caribbean brings together 15 countries, the United Nations Environment Programme, and other partners. Their experts are applying the tools of science and technology to protect the ocean and coastal lands from the growing effects of pollution and contamination. Similar projects are taking shape in Africa and other regions.

For the millions of people living on smaller islands, such partnerships promise more than cleaner seas. They promise a better life.

— *Lothar Wedekind, Editor-in-Chief*



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