

United States must be repaired. The “second oil rush in the Caspian” requires pipelines or other pathways to get the oil to market, and the Western firms with the easiest access to capital are denied some of the most viable routes—through Iran—by U.S.-Iranian enmity.

Iran’s loss has been Turkey’s gain. The Iraq war, instead of opening floodgates of Iraqi oil, initially did the opposite, providing an unforeseen boost to Caspian oil. Pipeline projects that skirt both Russia and Iran attracted more interest with each uptick in oil’s price. Turkish oil and gas transport projects that seemed far-fetched in the 1990s have proven successful, and new ones have gotten increased impetus, write Paul A. Williams and Ali Tekin, professors at Bilkent University in Ankara. As the three recently independent Caspian states stand poised to become major players in the world economy because of their energy reserves, Turkey, the area’s energy have-not nation, has already benefited from increased energy transit fees and better access to oil for its own economy.

Ghafouri concludes that the lure of oil wealth can go a long way toward promoting international cooperation in the Caspian. After years of rivalry in the Persian Gulf region, the joint development of offshore oil and natural gas resources is under way. And if the states in the volatile Persian Gulf can swallow their differences in the interest of making money, can the Caspian be far behind?

OTHER NATIONS

Ability Grouping

THE SOURCE: “Why Children Work, Attend School, or Stay Idle: The Roles of Ability and Household Wealth” by Marigee P. Bacolod and Priya Ranjan, in *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, July 2008.

THE SPECTER OF A 10-YEAR-OLD hauling bricks or stirring a vat of boiling liquid is far from eradicated in the developing world, where the International Labor Organization estimates that 218 million children are working at least part time instead of concentrating on school. But the reality of child labor is much more nuanced than such images suggest, according to new research by Marigee P. Bacolod and Priya Ranjan, economists at the University of California, Irvine. Poor children are not always consigned to work. New research from Cebu City in the Philippines shows that a significant percentage of children who are not in school are simply idle.

One of the main differences between children who go to school and those who don’t is academic ability. Children with high IQs—but with parents in the bottom third of the income scale—are nearly as likely to attend school (88 percent) as those from the most affluent third (89 percent), according to a study of 3,000 children in randomly selected Cebu City districts. Asked why their offspring were not in class, parents were most likely to respond that their children had “no interest” (36 percent). Even within the same poor family, children with high ability

were more likely to attend school than their less able brothers and sisters. Clearly, Bacolod and Ranjan say, some parents faced with paying the costs of education for children with low ability decide not to send them to work but to allow them to stay home. More than one in every 10 children in the study went to school and worked at the same time.

Richer families were more likely than poor ones to send their children with lower IQs to school. And parents were also more likely to dispatch their young of all ability levels to school if the facilities were better—judged by the presence of electricity, running water, toilets, and a usable blackboard.

An outright ban on child labor, which is often proposed as a solution to the horrors of the brick-yards and tanning factories, may have a perverse effect, according to the researchers. Parents who now send children to school while they are also working may respond to such a ban by pulling them out of school entirely and choosing the option of idleness.

OTHER NATIONS

India’s Sick Democracy

THE SOURCE: “India’s Parliament as a Representative Institution” by Jessica S. Wallack, in *India Review*, April–June 2008.

THE RECENT DEBATE OVER THE Indian-American nuclear cooperation agreement didn’t do a lot for the bottom-feeder image of the Indian parliament. Chanting, raging legislators heckled speakers and stormed

the well, members of parliament who had been jailed for murder were let out to vote, and a hospitalized lawmaker was wheeled in on a gurney. Three members of the main opposition, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), interrupted a Communist opponent in midspeech, waving wads of rupees they said were a down payment on a \$2.1 million bribe that the BJP members said they had been offered by the camp of the ruling Congress party to vote for the deal. On July 22 the Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament, finally ended months of suspense by handing the government a slender victory, 275 to 256. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh squeaked out a vote of confidence to keep him in power until he can run again next May.

The Indian public blames the average parliamentarian—in 2004, one-quarter of the legislators had criminal backgrounds—for the sham-

bles that is the Parliament of India, writes Jessica S. Wallack, the director of the Center for Development Finance in Chennai, India. But the dysfunction of the legislative branch goes deeper than the presence of a few murderers and thugs. Some of the problems are embedded in the structure of the institution.

The symptoms of failure read like a political-science disaster checkoff: Budgets pass in a flash; deliberations barely occur. Absenteeism is rife, disruptions frequent, and policy research rare. The bureaucracy must make policy (because the parliament can't agree) even as it is subject to the tyranny of being transferred around the country by legislative fiat. Judicial activism has kept the government functioning, but legislative failures are so great that two Supreme Court justices recently wrote that the public is fast losing faith even in the courts.

The problem is fundamental, Wal-

lack writes: "India's parliamentary procedures stand out among parliaments around the world in the limitations they place on most members' ability to represent their constituents in the normal course of debate or policymaking." Average members have little or no chance to ask questions, introduce bills, propose amendments, participate in meaningful debate, or disagree with their party. "Coalition members' powers to dissent are limited to the 'nuclear option' of bringing down the government." There is no intermediate way to work out disagreements.

The main hope for change is the rise in political competition. With small parties nipping at the heels of the long-dominant Congress party and the BJP, Indian leaders may eventually decide that if they don't fix the fundamental parliamentary rules, they may find themselves on the outside looking in.



Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh (standing, center) tries to speak as members of the lower house of the Indian parliament shout bribery allegations.