Review: Energy at the Crossroads: Global Perspectives and Uncertainties
By Vaclav Smil

Review by Umar Karim Mirza
Pakistan Institute of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Pakistan

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Vaclav Smil. *Energy at the Crossroads: Global Perspectives and Uncertainties*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003. 427 pp. ISBN 0-262-19492-9 (hardcover). US$34.95. Alkaline paper.

Dr. Vaclav Smil is Distinguished Professor of Geography at the University of Manitoba, Canada. His Ph.D. work, completed in 1971 at Pennsylvania State University, focused on long-range forecasting of energy and environment developments. Dr. Smil is the author of 18 books and has published over 250 papers in more than 80 different energy, environmental, Asian studies, and popular science periodicals. In 2001, he was presented the Award for Public Understanding of Science and Technology by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

The most crucial problem of today is, without doubt, how to preserve the environment while fulfilling the ever-increasing global demand for energy. In *Energy at the Crossroads,* Dr. Smil treats this very problem in a comprehensive way, detailing contemporary issues and giving an insight into our energy future.

Smil starts by providing reflections on his life as an energy analyst. He explains reasons for writing this book and describes his initial works. The book itself has been divided into six chapters. The first chapter discusses the trends and achievements related to energy that took place in the 20th century. Chapter 2 defines linkages of energy with economy, quality of life, environment and wars. Smil illustrates his viewpoint against quantitative forecasting in the third chapter. He gives multiple examples of forecasters failing to correctly predict future trends in a variety of fields, especially in energy consumption and its price fluctuations. The future of fossil fuels has been appraised in the next chapter. The fifth chapter deals with the potential and future of non-fossil energies. In the last chapter, Smil sums up his thoughts about our possible energy futures. Lists of units and abbreviations, prefixes and acronyms follow. An exhaustive list of approximately 800 references is included. The book ends with a relatively short index.

This is an excellent book overall. Smil has tackled all aspects of energy in a skilful manner. He gives a thorough introduction to the subject . He has

been unabashed in his critical analysis throughout and judges every argument on merit.

This book should be essential reading for energy analysts and planners, environmentalists, journalists, and politicians. Students of energy and environmental policy, and general readers can equally benefit from it.

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Umar Karim Mirza <mensan152@yahoo.com>, Ph.D. Scholar, Pakistan Institute of Engineering and Applied Sciences, P.O. Nilore, Islamabad 45650, Pakistan. TEL: 92-51-2207381, FAX: 92-51-9223727.