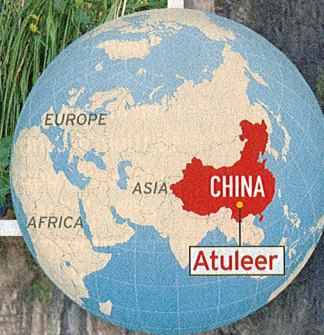
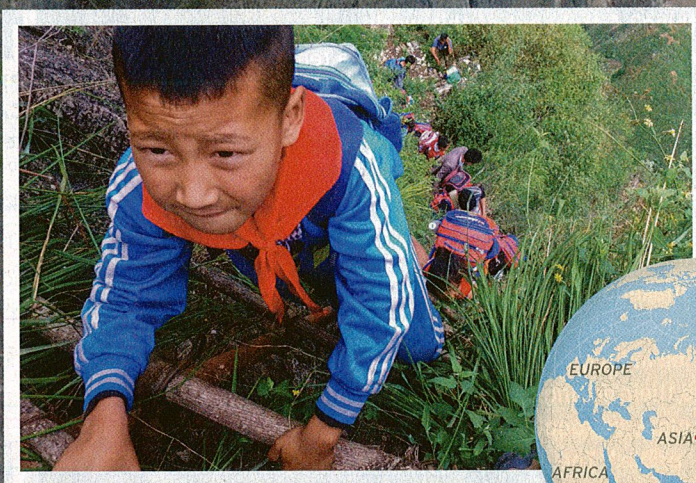


THE BIG PICTURE

A Dangerous Trek to School

Talk about a stressful commute. In the village of Atuleer, in the mountainous Sichuan province in southwestern China, 15 children descend more than 2,600 feet on unsteady ladders in an act worthy of mountain-climbing daredevils. Their purpose: simply to go to school. The students, who range in age from 6 to 15, climb down the sheer face of a bluff and attend classes for two weeks at a time. Twice a month, carrying backpacks and accompanied by two adults, they scale almost a half-mile up the cliff back to their homes. The trip takes about two hours going up and 90 minutes coming down. There's no room on the mountaintop to relocate the school and not enough land at the bottom of the mountain to accommodate the village's 72 families. But help may be on the way. After photos of the kids climbing up the shaky bamboo "sky ladders" surfaced in May, the local government said it would build a temporary steel staircase until it can construct a safer alternative. •





CO
S?

P

