

NEWS WRAP

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Severe flooding has left about 300,000 homeless in North Korea. Around Ten percent of all farmland has been ruined. Torrential rains that struck North Korea have been devastating. Large populations have been displaced, and arable land devastated. The fear of food shortages haunts North Korea, similar to the severe famine of the mid-1990s.

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There has been an increase in mental disorders of anxiety and depression in China. According to estimates of China's National Centre for Disease Control, about one hundred million of China's populations, suffer from mental illness. Experts at the Chinese Academy of Science's Institute of Psychology in Beijing, feel that the rise in anxiety and depression, is being caused by the tremendous pressure to earn more income and compete with the status level of neighbours. The mental health department carries unflattering images of political prisoners being confined in police-run psychiatric hospitals. Today the National Centre for Disease Control calculates that about a hundred million Chinese, suffer from various forms of mental illness. The stigma of professional treatment is fading. But only 2% of the mentally affected, seek professional therapy. General physicians diagnose and treat mental illness. The 17,000 certified psychiatrists in China, amount to one-tenth of the number in developed countries, in proportion to population. While the Freudian framework on childhood traumas and deep emotional connections make an average Chinese patient uncomfortable, behavioural and cognitive therapies are gaining ground. Even though social relationships are rooted in China's culture, cognitive and behavioural therapy are solving problems connected to rising wealth and expectations.

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Africa generates only 4% of the world's electricity, though it accounts for over a sixth of the population of the world. South Africa, Egypt and other North African littoral countries consume three-quarters of Africa's electricity. Most attempts at electrification in the 1970s and 1980s did not succeed in Africa. Dictators in certain African countries looted parts and fuel from power stations. While power stations were being built, they did not receive proper maintenance. After running at full capacity, turbines broke down, and were abandoned. Nigeria's demand for power is 7,600 megawatts, where the operating capacity of the power stations is 3,500 megawatts. Only 17 of Nigeria's 79 power stations, are in a functional state. There are power cuts of increasing frequency, accompanying Africa's recent economic growth, visible in factories and shopping centres. The economic migration of the rural poor to the cities, adds 12,000 households a month to the national grid of Kenya.

Thirteen African countries use 60% hydro-power for their energy requirements. While rainfall is variable, the dams function below capacity. New dams will be constructed on the Blue Nile and other rivers in Ethiopia. Dams will be built on the Niger, Volta and Bandama rivers in West Africa. Financial and environmental disputes obstruct dam construction. Uganda has constructed the 250 mw Bujagati dam on the White Nile. Only 6% of Congo's population have access to electricity. A project to erect a series of dams along the fair flowing Congo river, could theoretically produce 39,000 mw of electricity, in spite of problems relating to attacks on investors and electricity distribution of vast jungle terrain. Back-up generators supply 50% of Uganda's electricity needs, and 10% of Kenya's and Tanzania's. Over the next decade the global shortfall of power is calculated to exceed 500,000 mw.

A preponderance of coal fired power stations in South Africa leads to dirt and gas emissions. Electricity supply in the coastal cities of West Africa could be improved, by

the planned pipeline for carrying gas flared off in oil fields. Certain bio-fuel investors are working on jatropha, a seed producing plant, for burning in generators. About 7000mw electricity, could be derived from the Great Rift Valley, from Eritrea to Mozambique. By 2017, Kenya expects to gather 20% of its energy from geothermal sources. Hope also lies in the utilization of steady winds in African mountain ranges for power production. Solar farms could improve the rural economy and provide electricity to African cities, if the costs of utilizing the sun's warmth, are reduced to 30% below present costs.

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Fuel for nuclear power plants in India, is running out. According to experts, there is a danger of some units shutting down power generation, if the shortage continues for another year or two. Operating nuclear power stations, with a capacity of 4000 mw under the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd., have been compelled to reduce power production levels. While power shortage prevails in the country, the overall plant load factor (PLF) has fallen from 80/90% to about 60%. Even though new reactors for power generation have been commissioned, power sale income is stagnating at about Rs 3000 crores per year, for the last three years, owing to a "mismatch" in demand and supply of fuel. The fuel shortage induced fall in PLF has caused a loss of Rs 800 crores in potential revenue. Delays in the processing of mined ore at the Jadugada mines (Jharkhand) is contributing to the fuel shortage.□