

Hello again, and welcome back to the program that helps you learn and improve your American English. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. Today's broadcast is all about the South Asian country of Pakistan. First we will take you to an area where many people, especially children, are suffering. And we will hear what the national government is trying to do for them as they wait for this sound (thunder).

After that, we will travel to Pakistani Kashmir for some good news. Many people there use small machines to produce their own electricity, and hope to improve their way of life.

Each day on VOA, on shortwave, medium wave, FM, and by satellite and the Internet, we tell you about our world ...As It Is.

Many children are dying in the Tharparkar area of southeast Pakistan. They are victims of a long drought. Tharparkar has received little rainfall over the past two years. Recently, the government began sending food and water to the area. But experts in Pakistan say that effort came too late. They say the deaths could have been prevented if politicians had acted earlier.

At least 60 children have died in Tharparkar over the past three months. They are victims of water shortages and severe poverty.

The son of this woman died late last month.

“He fell ill due to hunger. Before, we had milk, yogurt, buttermilk for the children, but there’s nothing now. We’re poor people. How are we supposed to buy food?”

Earlier this month, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said the government would send money, food and medicine to the area.

“The provincial government and the Pakistani armed forces will get together to help you AND to get rid of your troubles. Now join me and chant: ‘Long Live Pakistan.’”

People in Tharparkar live in small, dusty villages. They have long lacked good health care services and dependable water supplies.

Harris Khalique is a public policy expert. He says the real problem is a lack of effective government planning.

“Malnutrition or malnourished is not caused because of a famine or a drought in Thar -- it is a permanent condition, unfortunately in Thar. There’s abject, grinding poverty in Tharparker, and it’s a complete failure of governance, but not just a failure of governance, it’s also a failure of the economic system within which we live in Pakistan.”

The World Bank says one third of Pakistan’s population lives in poverty. In the drought-affected area, most of the people are non-Muslim. Some observers say this means they do not get the same attention or services as other Pakistanis.

Back in Tharparkar, a woman named Sona brought her daughter to the local hospital. She says poverty and lack of basic services or schools cause children to suffer.

“It’s a drought now. There are no more rains. We cultivate even if there are only one or two rains. But all the crops dried up when the rains stopped, and nothing can be done. Those blessed with knowledge can easily fill their stomachs, but those who are illiterate, starve.”

Observers say Pakistan must develop its rural areas or places like Tharparkar will continue to experience periods of drought and death.

Many areas in Pakistan suffer energy shortages because of the country’s power grid, the wires and equipment that supply electricity to large areas. The grid does not reach all areas of the country. But in part of Pakistani Kashmir, people are now making their own electricity. They use small-scale turbines to create energy from the area’s many waterways. Christopher Cruise has the story.

The Neelum Valley of southeastern Pakistan is sometimes called “Heaven on Earth.” People there want to protect their forests and keep their environment clean. But the area also has a growing need for electricity. Shafiq Usmani is an official with the Neelum Valley Hydro-Electric Board.

“All the beauty of the Neelum Valley is dependent upon these forests, streams, this neat and clean water, and this can only be sustained if we are giving them the clean energy.”

Two hundred thousand people live in the Neelum Valley. But less than half of them get electricity from Pakistan’s national power grid. They may not need to because the Neelum River and other waterways flow with enough force to produce energy. Some communities have turned to small turbines -- called “hydel machines” -- to create electricity. A man named Rahimullah is one of the turbine operators.

“This hydel machine was installed with a share from 50 families, which costs us nearly \$3,000. We started this small hydro scheme as we needed it. We only get light from it and no other electric appliances. We start this turbine at 3 in the afternoon and switch it off the next day at 8 a.m.”

Villagers like Mushtaq Ahmad say the homemade machines have changed daily lives.

“When we had no electricity there was always smoke, as we use wood for heating and cooking, which causes diseases. Since we installed this project, thank God, we have gotten rid of these diseases and gained some other benefits.”

But even with the machines, there is not enough electricity for everyone. So trees are cut down to provide wood for fire. Sardar Basharat Ahmad is an engineer. He says the valley needs more turbines.

“Cutting down trees is a big loss. Using wood for heating and cooking causes health problems. If the hydel is promoted and new projects are set up, it will fulfill all the requirements of the people like cooking and heating, and it will save the cutting down of green trees.”

Pakistan commonly experiences power cuts, especially in the summer. These “blackouts” affect many people and hurt economic activity. The country is using only about ten percent of its possible hydropower. I’m Christopher Cruise.

I’m Jim Tedder in Washington. Today in the United States, we celebrate the births of two of our best writers. On this date in 1911, Tennessee Williams was born. Two of his most famous works are “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof” and “A Streetcar Named Desire.” His stories are mostly about people who have problems, and many of them are set in the American South. They are powerful and emotional.

Also born on this date was a man who tried farming, teaching, and even shoemaking, before he became famous for words like, “The woods are lovely, dark and deep. But I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep.” American poet Robert Frost was born on this date in 1874.

Thank you for spending some time with us today. More Learning English programs are just around the corner, and world news awaits you at the beginning of the hour on the Voice of America.

