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VOLATILE DEMAND, ERRATIC WEATHER

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SINGAPORE: Hydropower generation in Asia has plunged at the fastest rate in decades amid sharp declines in China and India, data shows, forcing power regulators battling volatile electricity demand and erratic weather to rely more on fossil fuels.

The two countries, which account for about 75 per cent of Asia's power generation and most of its emissions, are also to a lesser extent using renewables to make up for the hydropower shortfall and address rising electricity use.

Major Asian economies have faced power shortages in recent years due to extreme weather conditions, including intense

heat and lower rainfall over large swathes of northern China and Vietnam, as well as in India's east and the north.

Higher use of polluting fuels, such as coal, to meet electricity demand spikes and supply shortages underscore the challenges of lowering emissions. Asia's hydropower output fell 17.9 per cent during the seven months through July, data from energy think tank Ember showed, while fossil fuel-fired power rose 4.5 per cent.

"Despite a strong growth in solar and wind power generation in Asia, supply from fossil-fuel thermal power plants has also increased this year as a result of a large decline in hydropower gen-

eration," said Carlos Torres Diaz, Rystad Energy's director of power and gas markets.

"Intense and prolonged heatwaves across the region have resulted in low reservoir levels and the need for alternative sources of power to help meet demand," he added.

China's hydroelectricity generation during the eight months ended August declined at the sharpest rate since at least 1989, falling 15.9 per cent, an analysis of National Bureau of Statistics data showed.

In India, hydropower generation fell 6.2 per cent during the eight months ended August in the sharpest decline since 2016.

Its share of power output plunged to 9.2 per cent, the lowest in at least 19 years, according to an analysis of government data.

China made up for the hydro shortfall and higher power demand mainly by increasing electricity generation from fossil fuels by 6.1 per cent in the eight months through August, while India boosted fossil fuel-fired power output by 12.4 per cent, data showed.

Renewable output grew by 22 per cent in China and 18 per cent in India during the same period, data showed, but from a far smaller base.

Hydropower output also plunged in other major Asian

economies, including Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia, data from Ember and the International Energy Agency showed, mainly due to drier weather.

In Vietnam, hydropower's share of power output fell by more than 10 percentage points through July, Ember data showed. In some cases, the hydropower output plunge was a result of efforts to conserve water and alter supply patterns.

Asian power generation from wind and solar increased 21 per cent in the seven months to July, Ember data showed, rising to 13.5 per cent of overall output from 11.5 per cent a year earlier.

Reuters