

China to step up efforts to control Mother Nature

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File photo shows a cloud-bursting rocket being launched from a mobile unit in Jian, eastern China's Jiangxi province. China plans to step up a weather-manipulation programme that has stirred debate about tinkering with Mother Nature, state media said on Friday.

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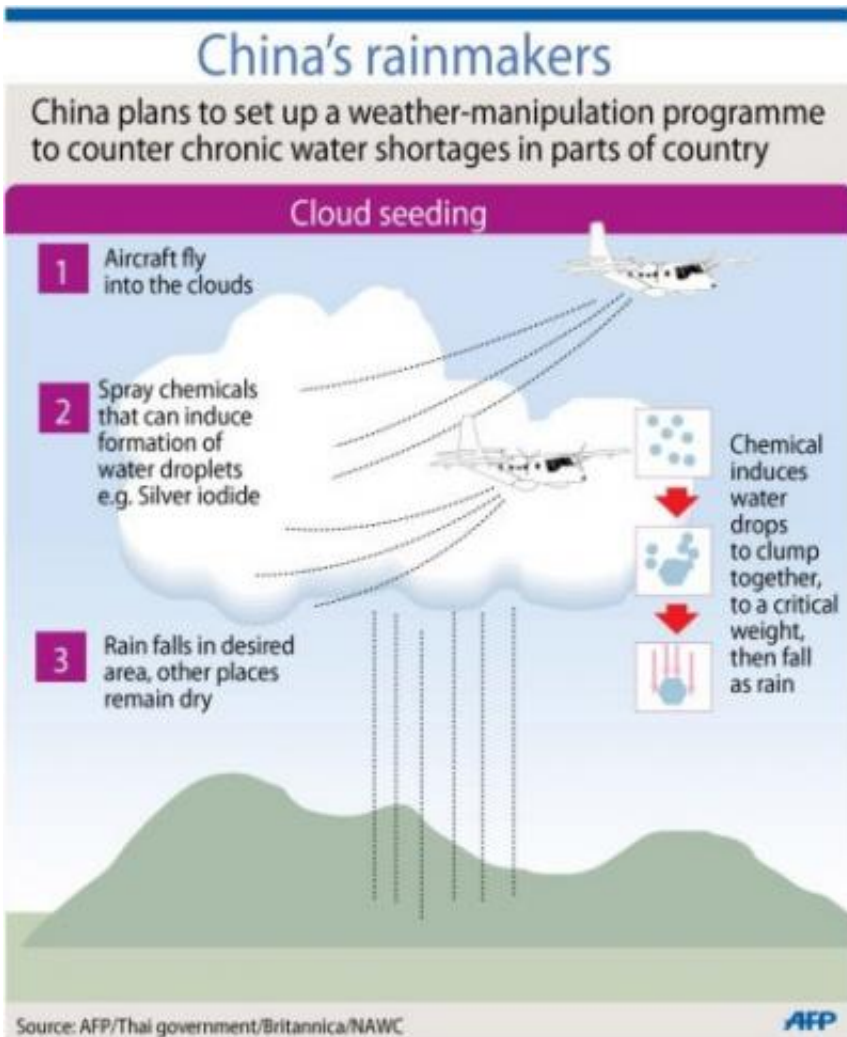
Zheng Guoguang, director of the China Meteorological Administration, said chronic [water shortages](#) in parts of the country will worsen in the decades ahead and "thus we need to control the weather," Xinhua news agency reported.

China last year began to set aside a special budget for weather-control activities, and spending grew 19 percent in the first 10 months of this year to 114 million dollars, the report said.

Such activities will be expanded to combat [extreme weather](#) such as droughts, "explore airborne water resources, improve the ecological environment," and secure stable water supplies for cities, industry and agriculture, Xinhua said, citing the administration's plans.

China has increasingly relied on weather-changing methods in recent years, both for political reasons and to address frequent droughts.

It fired chemical-laden "rain dispersal rockets" over Beijing to wring moisture out of threatening [clouds](#) and clear the capital's smoggy skies for the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony in August 2008.



Cloud-seeding typically involves firing substances such as silver iodide, salts and dry ice into the sky, which bring on the formation of larger raindrops. But the technique has sparked controversy.

It did the same ahead of the October 2009 60th National Day celebrations in the capital, which were headlined by a nationally televised military parade touting the country's rise.

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Beijing residents griped about flight delays, traffic snarls, cancelled classes and other inconveniences of a surprise heavy snowstorm in November 2009 that was artificially induced and was the city's earliest snowfall in 20 years.

Some experts also have said more research must be done into the potential effects of repeated use of such methods.

Chinese authorities divulge few details about weather-control efforts and repeated AFP requests for access to the programme have been refused.

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