

WorldWatch

by **David C. Grabbe**

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Insects

At least 60 percent of Ghana's total area is infested with the tsetse fly, which causes sleeping sickness or trypanosomiasis. The disease could cause havoc in the West African country unless steps are taken quickly. Sleeping sickness, a slow killer, affects both humans and animals, and there is no vaccine for it. Already, it has destroyed nearly 40 percent of the nation's livestock, particularly cattle, sheep, and goats. The disease can only be controlled through massive spraying with designated chemicals, most of which are toxic and expensive. Some estimate that it will take at least 20 years to spray Ghana's total infested area.

Mental Illness

In some parts of the U.S., mental illness is now the leading reason for hospitalization of those 5-19 years old. The most dramatic increase has been among younger school-aged children who suffer from depression and disruptive behavioral problems, such as "oppositional defiant" and conduct disorder. From 1990 to 1999, the hospitalization rate for children ages 5-14 grew from one in 900 kids to one in 750. During the same period, the hospitalization rate for adolescents 15-19 remained stable at one in 275 teens. By far, depressive disorders are the most common mental health problems, accounting for 46 percent of the mental illnesses in children 5-14 and a whopping 67 percent in teens age 15-19.

Prostitution

Even though prostitution is illegal in Japan, the sex industry there is reputed to generate more income than the national defense budget. Enforcement of the law is almost non-existent, and nothing is being done to eradicate red-light districts. Tens of thousands of young women are drawn to these places each year, largely because of high debt, unemployment, or simply wanting to buy the latest fashions.

European Union

» On January 1, 2002, twelve European nations will start bidding a fond farewell to their respective currencies and commit to going fully "online" with the euro, Europe's single common currency, by February 28, 2002. It will rank as the single biggest monetary event in history. As a result, the U.S. dollar may be severely weakened. For instance, the economic strength represented by the euro nations (greater than the U.S. in terms of gross domestic product and world trade) and the changing perception that Europe is on the way to becoming a major superpower are both factors. In addition, the terrorist events in America, a continuing U.S. recession, and a poor dollar performance against the euro in 2001 all set the stage for the changeover. With the euro's emergence at this critical juncture, the world may begin seeing America as a suddenly vulnerable superpower, spurring a loss of confidence in the dollar and a subsequent rise in

confidence in the euro. A report by the HSBC Group of London on the declining dollar says, "The risk of a disorderly meltdown scenario is increasing, raising significant dangers for the global economy."

» Romano Prodi, European Commission president, wants Brussels to take far-reaching new powers over government spending, foreign policy, defense, and police to transform the European Union into a global superpower. Recently, Prodi said the commission was planning to tighten its grip over the tax-and-spend policy of Britain and other member states. He proposes "a model budget policy" as the next stage towards economic union, describing the new policy as a "mechanism for managing the economy," a clear indication that the plans go far beyond anything existing in union law. He also calls for sweeping changes in defense and internal security, saying the terrorist attacks on September 11 had changed the political landscape, making it imperative to accelerate European integration. He calls for "the entire foreign and security policy of the union" to be brought under EU control, saying that "piecemeal" diplomacy prevents the union from playing its full role in the world. He also seeks enhanced powers for Europol and for "the creation of an integrated European police force to combat terrorism and organized crime."