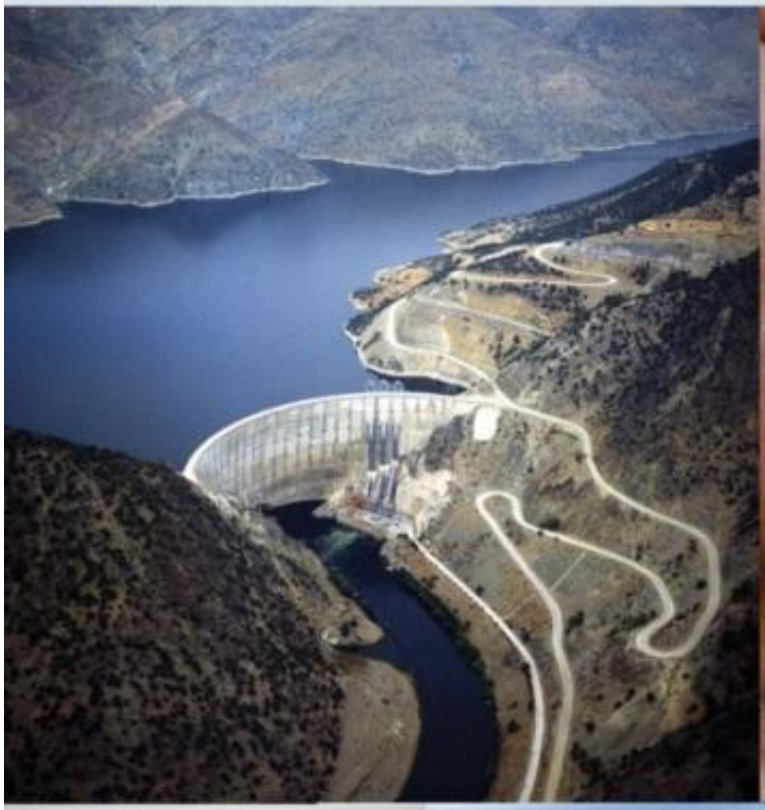


ORSAM WATER BULLETIN

Weekly Bulletin by ORSAM Water Research Programme

Events-News-Politics-Projects-Environment-ClimateChange-Neighbourhoods-Cooperation-Disputes-Scarcity and more





Issue 168

ORSAM WATER BULLETIN

17 February – 23 February 2014

- Water levels in Turkey's dams raise alarm
- Experts warn about deficiencies of project to transfer River Aras water to Lake Urmia
- Saving dying lake is priority for Iranian leader
- Iran in a race to save largest lake from drying up
- Iran's eco-disaster: One of the world's biggest salt-water lakes shrinks by 80% in ten years
- Scientists from Leicester offer helping hand to Iraq
- Israeli Water, Mideast Peace?
- Biblical Waters: Can the Jordan River Be Saved?
- Israel's water apartheid embraced by Italy
- Palestinians need Israeli know-how on water desalination
- BGU study: Organic farming may pollute groundwater
- Water consumption up 4.5% in 2013
- The Israeli 'watergate' scandal: The facts about Palestinian water
- Report: Israel's Exploitation of Palestinian Water Resources
- Amira Hass, Ha'aretz Publish False Water Charges
- Fresh water and old assumptions
- Water torture for the Palestinians
- Israel Cuts Off Water Supply to Several Homes in Jerusalem's Old City
- Israel's Water Situation: From Abundance to Crisis
- Water scarcity among critical food security issues in Near East and North Africa – UN
- Middle East's Water Scarcity Seen as Food Security Issue
- Ethiopia army voices readiness to pay the price for Nile dam
- Egypt: Sudan and Egypt Hold Meetings On Nile Waters in Khartoum
- Egypt to discuss Renaissance dam with EU ambassadors

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- **Is Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam?**
- **Egypt: Sudan Foreign Minister Criticises Egypt Over Ethiopian Dam Dispute**
- **China to spend $330 billion to fight water pollution**
- **Mekong Delta to suffer fresh water shortage next month**
- **Lao Dam Plan Threatens Endangered Mekong Dolphins**
- **Government urged to start construction of Kalabagh, Dasu, Bonji dams**
- **NENA Region Faces Fresh Water Scarcity**
- **AfriForum to start monitoring municipal water quality**
- **Govt to construct two dams on Bagmati river**
- **Update: Fahmy visits DRC and Tanzania**
- **Drought creates political divide**
- **No deal: Suburbs say can't trust Detroit in water system negotiations**

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❖ Water levels in Turkey's dams raise alarm

The weather will be unseasonably warm this week, while those living in cities fear a drought in the summer with the water level having slipped to 30.8 percent in Istanbul's dams, while the capitalAnkara is not faring much better with 36 percent.

Turkey will be under the effect of warm weather until the end of this week, the general directorate of meteorological service said in a statement. The country, except eastern Anatolia, will experience temperatures between five to 10 degrees above average, while the officials predict the water in the dams will not meet the city's need for tap water this summer if the weather continues to be warm with no rain on the way.

The water level in all 10 dams of Istanbul fell to 30.87 percent, according to the data collected by the State Water Affairs (DSİ). The water levels in Istanbul's 10 dams are as follows: 42.11 percent in Ömerli Dam, 0.18 percent in Pabuçdere Dam, 17.06 percent in Sazlıdere Dam, 29.26 percent in Büyükçekmece Dam, 21.05 percent in Alibey Dam, 40.99 percent in Terkos Dam, 14.84 percent in Kazandere Dam, 6.7 percent in Elmalı Dam, 30.26 percent in Darlık Dam and 12.97 percent in Istrancalar Dam.

Istanbul Mayor Kadir Topbaş admitted via his Twitter account Feb. 17 that Istanbul was experiencing a drought.

Forestry and Waterworks Minister Veysel Eroğlu also said 2.5 million cubic meters of water was used in Istanbul daily, but assured that the city would not experience any scarcity in its water supply.

"There won't be a lack of water. We will provide water, don't worry. We have plans A, B and C. We even saved some municipalities under the opposition parties. İzmir [currently run by a municipality from the main opposition Republican People's Party] would have had a scarcity of water, but we saved them," said Eroğlu in Tekirdağ. Eroğlu also said rain was coming to Turkey over the weekend and added there would not be any problems with the water supply.

Other metropolitan cities are also facing droughts with low levels of rain and water. The water levels in Ankara's dams are as follows, according to the DSİ data: 13 percent in Kavşakkaya Dam, 16 percent in Akyar Dam, 31 percent in Eğrekkaya Dam, 32 percent in Çubuk Dam, 36 percent in Çamlıdere Dam and 61 percent in Kurtboğazı Dam. The water level in all of the capital city's six dams decreased to 36 percent in total.

The water levels are slightly better in İzmir compared to Istanbul, with Balçova Dam at 46.98 percent, Güzelhisar Dam 58.11 percent, Tahtalı Dam 61.49 percent, Ürkmez Dam 61.07 percent and Gördes dam 19.56 percent water level.

Agriculture Minister Mehdi Eker warned last month the country was facing a serious drought. "Turkey is having a strong meteorological drought, which we are following with concern. We hope, wish and pray this will end in the following weeks," said Eker.

On Jan. 10, Eroğlu said Istanbul experienced a drought every seven years and 2014 appeared to be one of those years.

"Istanbul has a drought once every seven years. It has a worse drought once every 17 years. There was a drought in 1994 and there will be a drought in 2014. But we are taking measures and there is no need to worry," said Eroğlu.

"Water levels in Turkey's dams raise alarm", 17/02/2014, online at: http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/water-levels-in-turkeys-dams-raise-alarm.aspx?pageID=238&nID=62590&NewsCatID=340

BACK TO TOP

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❖ Experts warn about deficiencies of project to transfer River Aras water to Lake Urmia

Some experts warn about the deficiencies of Iran project to transfer the River Aras water to the Lake Urmia which is experiencing its worst drought condition in recent decades.

Member of the Iranian parliament's presidium Alireza Munadi said last week, the required environmental and technical permission for the implementation of the project to transfer the River Aras water to Lake Urmia has already been received, the Iranian İRNA agency reported.

Munadi said the economic evaluation of the project has been carried out and its implementation will soon begin, adding that the contracting companies in this project have already been chosen and investments for the implementation of the project will be provided by a German company.

He said currently, preparatory work to start the project is underway and the project will be launched by the end of the year (Iranian calendar year), stressing around $1.2 billion will be invested in the project.

However, the River Aras is a trans-boundary river and water transfer from there will probably affect the river's ecology. The water transfer will also have impacts on people's life living along the River Aras, as its water is used for drinking and irrigation.

Commenting on the issue, Director of Geography Institute of Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences (ANAS), Ramiz Mammadov told AzerNews that the water transfer from the River Aras will negatively affect the ecosystem of the river.

Mammadov said water transfer from the river can lead to the reduction of water in the downstream of the river and as a result to drying up the river in some places.

He said this project even has not support in Iran especially the Ardabil province of Iran was against it saying this will negatively affect supply of drinkable water and water for irrigation.

The project on directing 600 million cubic meters of water from Aras River into Lake Urmia was launched during a visit by former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and government officials to Tabriz in 2010. Some $1.2 billion is to be allocated to implement the project.

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Azerbaijan and Iran has signed agreement on the rules for the use of water and energy resources of the River Aras. Under the agreement, Azerbaijan and Iran should use the river's water and energy resources at the same level.

Commenting on the issue, the Iranian ecologist, Professor Esmail Kahrom told AzerNews that the ecologists in Iran do not agree with this project, because it damages the watering of Arasbaran protected area and all the agricultural lands over there and all the way from river to Lake Urmia.

"Also we do not have enough water to transfer to Urmia Lake. The Lake Urmia is in the higher altitude relative to Aras River so we have to spend a lot of money and energy to transfer the water," Kahrom said.

He said on the other hand, Azerbaijan does not agree with that because the water in Aras River is shared, it is common between Iran and Azerbaijan. "So I think this project will never ever take off, it will never be implemented," Kahrom said. He added that it is against all the international laws and rules.

Also, Iran prepared project to transfer Caspian Sea water to Lake Urmia. Iranian Energy Minister Hamid Chitchian said last month Iranian parliament has approved the project on transfer of water from the Caspian Sea to the Lake Urmia and deserts in the country's central parts.

Chitchian noted that funds have been allocated from Iran's state budget for this project.

Commenting on this issue, Kahrom said it is even more difficult, because Caspian Sea is in the lower plain.

He said the altitude of Caspian Sea in some areas is about -21 meters below the level of the sea waters and oceans, but the Lake Urmia is almost 850 meters above the Caspian Sea, therefore Iran has to spend more money and energy to transfer the water.

"So I do not think it is possible to do that and I do not think that we will do that. Actually, we have a committee working towards reviving Lake Urmia and this committee has decided that transfer of water is not a wise thing to do because the above mentioned reasons," Kahrom said.

Chitchian said earlier uncontrolled development of agricultural areas around the Lake Urmia is the main reason for the lake's drying up, adding that if agricultural water consumption isn't managed properly, the Lake Urmia will never be revived.

He said agricultural areas around the Lake have increased from 150,000 hectares to 480,000 hectares in recent years.

Chitchian further added that the areas consume some 3.1 billion cubic meters of water per each year, noting the figure is exactly equal to the needed water for the lake's revival.

Climatic changes are another reason which led Lake Urmia to dry up, Chitchian said.

He said the average temperature has increased by 1-2 degrees, while annual rainfall has decreased.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has established a working group to tackle the issue of saving Lake Urmia.

Rohani also signed special instruction to suspend work on the construction of the dam around Lake Urmia.

The shoaling problem of Lake Urmia is a matter of concern not only to the Iranian government, but also to the other countries and international organizations of the world.

UN Resident Coordinator Gary Lewis in October 2013 proposed ways to prevent the death of the world's largest saltwater lake, the Lake Urmia.

Lewis warned in his report that the slow death of the Lake Urmia signals a warning for the future.

Over 70 percent of Lake Urmia's water has dried up. The level of the water has been declining since 1995.

The area of Lake Urmia is the third largest salt water lake on earth, which has 6,000 square kilometers surface. During the migrations of birds the lake becomes their temporary home. The lake's drying up has an impact on the flora and fauna of the region. Experts on environmental issues say that the measures taken by the Iranian government are not enough to save the lake.

The Iranian government allocated $900 million to prevent Lake Urmia's drying up in September 2011.

Also, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) has allocated $135 million to Iran to resolve environmental problems with shoaling of the lake.

"Experts warn about deficiencies of project to transfer River Aras water to Lake Urmia", 21/02/2014, online at: http://www.azernews.az/analysis/64617.html

BACK TO TOP

❖ Saving dying lake is priority for Iranian leader

OROUMIEH, Iran — The first cabinet decision made under Iran's new president, Hassan Rouhani, wasn't about how to resolve his country's nuclear dispute with world powers. It was about how to keep the nation's largest lake from disappearing.

Lake Oroumieh, one of the biggest saltwater lakes on Earth, has shrunk more than 80 percent to 1,000 square kilometers (nearly 400 square miles) in the past decade, mainly because of climate change, expanded irrigation for surrounding farms and the damming of rivers that feed the body of water, experts say. Salt-covered rocks that were once deep underwater now sit in the middle of desert.

Experts fear the lake — famous in years past as a tourist spot and a favorite stopping point for migrating flamingos, pelicans and gulls — could disappear within two years if nothing is done.

"The lake is gone. My job is gone. My children are gone. Tourists, too," said Mozafar Cheraghi, 58, as he stood on a dusty platform that was once his bustling teahouse.

Less than a decade ago, he recalled, he hosted dozens of tourists a day, with his two sons taking them on boat tours. His children have since left to pursue work elsewhere.

"I sold a dozen boats and kept half a dozen here, hoping the water will return," he said. "But it didn't happen."

Rescuing the lake in northwestern Iran, near the Turkish border, was one of Rouhani's campaign promises, and his new cabinet promptly decided to form a team to invite scholars to help find solutions.

The president is putting an emphasis on tackling long-neglected environmental problems critics say were made worse by his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. An engineer with an appetite for giant populist projects, Ahmadinejad pursued policies that led to the expansion of irrigation projects and construction of dams.

"Rouhani stands by his campaign promise to revive the lake," Isa Kalantari, a popular scholar appointed by Rouhani to lead the rescue team, said at a conference in Oroumieh this week.

The new administration in Tehran is seeking input on the lake beyond Iran's borders, raising at least the possibility for further avenues of dialogue at a time when Iran is showing a greater willingness to engage with the West.

This week's gathering included a number of foreign experts in addition to the Iranian scientists charged with trying to reverse the trend at Oroumieh and saving Iran from a major environmental and economic disaster. Authorities gave no precise figures on the number of foreigners advising Iranian scientists on the project, but they included representatives from the United States, Russia and Belgium.

"Don't blame nature and drought. Human beings, not climate change, are responsible for this situation. We dried up the lake because of our excessive demands and wrong methods. Now, we have to revive it ourselves. Five million people have to leave this region if the lake dies," Kalantari said.

Kalantari and his team are to come up with a final rescue plan by May.

Twenty proposals are on the table for saving the lake, including cloud-seeding to increase rainfall in the area and the building of pipelines to bring in more water. Experts have also proposed the creation of other industries to reduce reliance on agricultural water.

The government has already begun a project to raise public awareness and encourage farmers to abandon wasteful practices and adopt drip irrigation systems that save water. It is also urging farmers to switch to less-thirsty crops. Wheat and pistachios, for example, use less water than sugar beets.

In the village of Govarchinghaleh, near the lake, Nader Hazrati and his son, Ali, grow grapes and almonds.

"A decade ago, this was a green area. Now it is not because of decrease in rainfall. With the level of water in the lake going down, water in wells has gone down too. If we dig deeper, the water gets very salty and isn't fit even for agricultural use. Our grape and almond harvest has fallen dramatically," Ali said.

Ali, 27, said salty winds have killed some of his almond trees.

The effect on crops has prompted many villagers to leave the place of their birth. Govarchinghaleh had about 1,000 people a decade ago. Now, only 300 live in the village overlooking the shrinking lake. Once there were three schools; now there is one, serving a dozen students.

Not far away, trucks hauling salt, a new business, could be seen driving over the dry lake bottom.

Ali Asghar Siab Qudsi, a university teacher and one of the organizers of the conference, said dams and the digging of more than 24,000 unauthorized wells — in addition to some 30,000 legal ones — are among the reasons for the shrinking of the lake. He said increasing evaporation and cultivation of thirsty crops such as sugar beets have worsened the crisis.

Lakes in other parts of Iran are facing a similar crisis, though not as severe as at Oroumieh. Even residents of Tehran experience water shortages on weekends, and authorities are making plans for possible rationing in the capital.

Authorities have warned of a national disaster in the coming decade if water is not managed properly.

"My No. 1 demand is to see our dying lake back to life. Will that happen in my lifetime?" Cheraghi asked.

"Saving dying lake is priority for Iranian leader", 19/02/2014, online at:
http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/saving-dying-lake-is-priority-for-iranian-leader/2014/02/19/700c1b52-9960-11e3-b1de-e666d78c3937_story.html

BACK TO TOP

❖ Iran in a race to save largest lake from drying up

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An engineer with an appetite for giant populist projects, Mr Ahmadinejad pursued policies that led to the expansion of irrigation projects and construction of dams.

"Rouhani stands by his campaign promise to revive the lake," Isa Kalantari, a popular scholar appointed by Mr Rouhani to lead the rescue team, said at an international conference in Oroumieh this week.

The gathering brought experts from Iran and around the world to discuss the best options for reversing the trend and saving Iran from a major environmental and economic disaster.

"Don't blame nature and drought. Human beings, not climate change, are responsible for this situation. We dried up the lake because of our excessive demands and wrong methods. Now, we have to revive it ourselves. Five million people have to leave this region if the lake dies," Mr Kalantari said. Mr Kalantari and his team are to come up with a final rescue plan by May.

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“My No 1 demand is to see our dying lake back to life,” Mr Cheraghi said. “Will that happen in my lifetime?”

“Iran in a race to save largest lake from drying up”, 22/02/2014, online at: http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-1-234128-Iran-in-a-race-to-save-largest-lake-from-drying-up

BACK TO TOP

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❖ Iran's eco-disaster: One of the world's biggest salt-water lakes shrinks by 80% in ten years

Lake Oroumieh has shrunk more than 80% to 1,000 square kilometers
Experts fear the lake – famous as a tourist spot and a stopping point for migrating flamingos, pelicans and gulls – could disappear within two years
Climate change, nearby farms using it for irrigation and the damming of rivers is being blamed for the shrinking

As a country, it faces threats of terrorism, nuclear power and frosty international relations with world leaders.

But Iran is focusing on another problem – a shrinking lake.

Lake Oroumieh, of the world's biggest saltwater lakes, is in danger of completely drying up because of climate change, nearby farms using it for irrigation and the damming of rivers.

Two men walk toward salt-covered rocks that were once deep underwater at Lake Oroumieh. Expanded irrigation for surrounding farms and the damming of rivers that feed the body of water have been attributed to the shrinking lake

It has shrunk more than 80 percent to 1,000 square kilometers (nearly 400 square miles) in the past decade, experts say.

Salt-covered rocks that were once deep underwater now sit in the middle of desert.

Experts fear the lake – famous in years past as a tourist spot and a favorite stopping point for migrating flamingos, pelicans and gulls – could disappear within two years if nothing is done.

"Iran's eco-disaster: One of the world's biggest salt-water lakes shrinks by 80% in ten years", 20/02/2014, online at: http://beforeitsnews.com/environment/2014/02/irans-eco-disaster-one-of-the-worlds-biggest-salt-water-lakes-shrinks-by-80-in-ten-years-2493496.html

BACK TO TOP

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❖ Scientists from Leicester offer helping hand to Iraq

Scientists from Leicester and Iraq are joining forces to find better ways to meet the demand for food and water.

The University of Leicester and Soran University, in Kurdistan, have set up the International Centre for Natural Resources Research.

Researchers will look at problems including the issue of providing clean drinking water to the people of the Kurdish region of Iraq.

The centre will also help set up a degree course in natural resources management at Soran University.

A signing ceremony was held at Soran University on February 11 and visitors from Leicester attended.

Professor Heiko Balzter, director of the University of Leicester's Centre for Landscape and Climate Research, said: "This is a hugely important bilateral agreement.

"Soran University is a new university in Kurdistan region of Iraq, which is rapidly developing now that the armed conflicts are over."

"Scientists from Leicester offer helping hand to Iraq", 17/02/2014, online at:
http://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/Scientists-offer-helping-hand-Iraq/story-20642156-detail/story.html

BACK TO TOP

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❖ Israeli Water, Mideast Peace?

Nuclear proliferation, religious militancy and income inequality are all major threats to Middle East stability. Sadly, a new one is brewing: water scarcity.

The human causes are clear: rapid population growth, antiquated infrastructure, the over-pumping of aquifers, inefficient crop practices and pollution from fertilizer and pesticides. Then there are the factors that climate change is accelerating, like evaporation of lakes and rivers and diminished rainfall.

One country in the region might have a solution to these water woes: Israel. It shares the same problems of climate and desertification as its neighbors, but it has mastered the management of water resources, such that it can endure periodic droughts while supporting a growing population. Its water management can not only be a model but can even reduce regional tensions.

Wasteful farming practices — in particular, flooding a field to irrigate it — are the biggest factor behind the regional water shortage. Starting in the 1960s, Israeli farmers abandoned this technique in favor of drip irrigation, which reduces the loss of water to evaporation, gets water to roots more efficiently and, critically, produces crop yields vastly greater than those with conventional irrigation. Israel also treats household sewage as a precious resource, reusing more than 80 percent of it for agriculture. In Iran and many Arab countries, sewage is dumped, which can threaten public health by contaminating wells and aquifers.

There is precedent for Israel's helping its neighbors with water. Before 1979 —around the time it began to adopt technologies and policies that led to its current water abundance — Israel was Iran's partner in developing its national water resources.

That cooperation began in 1962, after a severe earthquake in the Qazvin region of Iran killed more than 12,000 people. The earthquake collapsed a chain of wells that engineers had drilled in a qanat, or tunnel, style. Hundreds of thousands were at risk from lack of drinking water. Israel flew in teams of drillers. New water supplies were identified, and a series of artesian wells were drilled. The drilling was such a success that Israel's water engineering company, today a private enterprise, was hired to identify and gain access to underground resources elsewhere in Iran.

Beginning in 1968, a desalination company owned by the Israeli government built dozens of plants in Iran. These are now aging, while Israel continues to innovate: On its Mediterranean coast, it recently opened an immense, energy-efficient desalination plant. More than half of Israel's drinking water — purer, cleaner and less salty than natural sources — now comes from seawater.

Cooperation with Iran abruptly ended with the Islamic revolution. Indeed, the Israeli team of water experts was on one of the last direct flights from Iran to Israel in 1979.

Wars over water have been forecast as a coming threat worldwide, and the geopolitical risks can't be discounted. Syria, ruined by civil war, and Iraq, still an epicenter of religious violence, will suffer even more, as Turkey accelerates its diversion of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers to make up for its shortsighted over-pumping of once-massive Anatolian aquifers. Egypt, with 10 times Israel's population but nearly 50 times the water available, uses water inefficiently, despite the age-old centrality of agriculture to its economy. Ethiopia, upriver to Sudan and Egypt, is asserting water rights to the Nile for its growing population, putting it in tension with Egypt. Yemen might be in the worst shape: Short of immediate, radical steps, it could be out of water in 15 years.

Because of geography and hydrology, the Palestinians' water future is closely tied to Israel's. In just the few years of Hamas control of Gaza, the water supply there has been polluted, and though no solution to its coming water crisis is likely without an Israeli role, Hamas has refused to cooperate with Israel.

The Palestinians in the West Bank already receive much of their water from Israel's national water utility and, sovereignty and symbolism aside, neither a two-state solution nor a continuation of the status quo will change that. Given their proximity to Israel, the Palestinians are likely to be among the few Arab winners in the water race.

Israel's self-sufficiency in water goes beyond irrigation, drilling, desalination and reclaimed water. It is also dependent on a sophisticated legal and regulatory structure, market mechanisms, robust public education, an obsession with fixing leaks and efforts to catch rainwater and reduce evaporation, among many other tools. Natural plant-breeding methods have raised crop yields with salty, high-mineral brackish water of the kind found, but mostly thought of as worthless, all over the Middle

East. Israel has transformed water from a struggle with nature to an economic input: You can get all you want if you plan and pay for it.

No one should wish for a water crisis anywhere. But as water problems grow, one hopes that ideology will give way to pragmatism and may open a door to an Arab and Islamic outreach to Israel. A partnership that starts with engineers and extends to farmers could contribute to deal making, even reconciliation, among leaders. Rather than seeing Israel as a problem, Israel's antagonists would be wise to see it as a solution.

"Israeli Water, Mideast Peace?", 16/02/2014, online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/17/opinion/israeli-water-mideast-peace.html?src=twr&_r=0

BACK TO TOP

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❖ Biblical Waters: Can the Jordan River Be Saved?

With the swelling ranks of Syrian refugees in Jordan, an overstressed river is at risk of going dry.

If Jesus were to plunge into the Jordan River today, he might well injure himself.

The great biblical waterway is now little more than a shallow, unimposing trickle of sludge, a murky body of water that is in danger of withering into nothingness.

"Is that it? Seriously, that's the Jordan? I could jump it," declared one mightily unimpressed American teenager, as we crossed the river from the Kingdom of Jordan to the Palestinian West Bank one blindingly bright afternoon back in October.

There's no real mystery as to how the river famous as the reputed site of Jesus' baptism has sunk so low.

"Everybody's been taking water from the Upper Jordan because everybody needs it," said Clive Lipchin, director of the Center for Transboundary Water Management at Israel's Arava Institute, and one of a number of water experts alarmed by the decline of a river that was never particularly substantial in the first place.

What remains of the Jordan springs from its source high in the Lebanese mountains, before it passes near the Syrian border and along the Jordanian, Israeli, and Palestinian frontiers.

It's one of the most complicated and conflict-ridden regions on Earth, and that goes some way toward explaining the Jordan River's current predicament.

Fighting Over Water

Cooperation between Israel and its Arab neighbors is rare, which leaves the river and its problems hostage to 65 years of distrustful and often hostile coexistence.

"There's no water because Israel steals it all," said Mohammed, a Bedouin goat herder who tends his brother's flock in the parched Jordanian hills near Mount Nebo, where Moses is said to be buried.

"Jordan and the Palestinians are responsible because they waste everything," Yitzhak Adami, a Jerusalem taxi driver, told me, as we wove our way toward a hilltop Jewish settlement in the occupied West Bank.

But as fraught as relations between Israel and Jordan remain, despite the peace treaty they signed in 1994, it's Syria's struggles that preoccupy water policymakers' thoughts.

Indeed, the river might be described as the latest victim in a brutal Syrian civil war that is thought to have killed at least 130,000 people and displaced almost seven million so far. (Read "Damascus: Will the Walls Fall?" in *National Geographic* magazine.)

Almost 2.5 million refugees have fled Syria to date (up from 550,000 in January last year), and 600,000 of them have settled in arid and water-impoverished Jordan, a country of slightly fewer than 6.5 million citizens. (Read "Journey Without End" in *National Geographic* magazine.)

Environmental issues have understandably been a very distant second to humanitarian concerns, but the ongoing chaos and fast-increasing mass of refugees needing water have stretched the Jordan River's already desperately meager flow to a trickle.

Refugees Straining Capacity

Some communities in the dusty, pancake-flat expanse of northern Jordan will tell you their cities' water resources long ago reached a desperate state. The new pressures could bring them to the breaking point.

An old farmer sleepily perched next to his fruit stand outside Mafraq sadly shook his head and just repeated "too many people, too many people," when asked about the influx of new arrivals.

At less than 10 miles (16 kilometers) from the Syrian frontier, and 20 miles (32 kilometers) from Deraa, where the opening salvo of the Syrian revolution was fired in March 2011, Mafraq was always going to be the first port of call for many refugees.

But no one could have guessed the enormity of the Syrian exodus.

Syrians now far outnumber longtime residents, and non-Syrian Arabic accents are a comparative rarity in the teeming coffeehouses around Mafraq's potholed main drags.

Over 80 percent of Syrians who are registered with the UN's refugee agency in Jordan arrived in 2013, and a third of them are in Mafraq Governorate.

Many of the established inhabitants of Jordan are originally refugees themselves.

Several waves of Palestinians arrived after the creation of Israel in 1948, and thousands of Iraqis settled there after the Gulf War in the early '90s and during the civil war that rocked their country a few years after the American invasion in 2003.

"Biblical Waters: Can the Jordan River Be Saved?", 22/02/2014, online at:
http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/02/140222-jordan-river-syrian-refugees-water-environment/

BACK TO TOP

❖ Israel's water apartheid embraced by Italy

Israel's policy of "water apartheid" made a rare appearance in the mainstream media over the past few weeks.

Martin Schulz, the European Parliament's president, drew a furious response from some Israeli politicians when he spoke during an address to the Israeli parliament, the Knesset of how Israeli settlers receive far more water than indigenous Palestinians in the occupiedWest Bank.

Although Schulz cited figures mentioned to him by young people in Ramallah that were not accurate, the underlying problem is a very real one. A report published by the United Nations Human Rights Council last year stated that the average Israeli settler consumes as much as 400 liters per day, whereas a Palestinian in the West Bank has to make do with 73 liters and — in the case of many Bedouins — just 10 liters.

Despite that evidence, the Italian authorities have been happy to embrace Mekorot, the Israeli firm which diverts most of the water extracted from Palestinian springs to Israelisettlements.

Amnesty International has documented how Palestinians face severe rationing of water, particularly during the summer months, in order to ensure that Israeli settlers can still enjoy their swimming pools and floral displays ("Troubled Waters," 27 October 2009 [PDF]).

At the Italy-Israel summit in Rome during December 2013, a cooperation agreement was signed between Mekorot and Acea, Italy's largest water utility. Both firms undertook to examine how "cutting-edge technologies" for water management could be exchanged.

Palestine solidarity and public water campaigners have joined forces to oppose the agreement.

"Instrument of war"

"Water is used by the Israeli government and state companies like Mekorot as an instrument of war, oppression and power," Paolo Carsetti from the Italian Forum of Water Movements told The Electronic Intifada. "This is why we actively support this campaign."

Much of the attention has focused on the city of Rome, which has a majority stake in Acea. A letter signed by groups representing Palestinian farmers, youth and environmentalists argued that the proposed collaboration would flout the city authority's "legal obligation not to provide recognition or

assistance to Israeli violations of international law" ("Palestinians ask Rome not to sign with Mekorot," Stop the Wall, 6 February 2014).
The cooperation between Acea and Mekorot takes place against the backdrop of an ongoing debate about how water should be managed in Italy.

In a 2011 referendum, 95 percent of voters rejected two laws aimed at privatizing water services ("EPSU welcomes the result of the Italian water referendum," European Federation of Public Services Unions, 14 June 2011).

Protests

Since then, campaigners have continued the struggle to have the referendum results honored as authorities repeatedly sought to circumvent the public's will.

In January this year, three days of protest were held in Rome to demand that services run by Acea be restored to public ownership. An end to Acea's partnership with Mekorot were among the demands made by protesters.

As the protests got underway, the Israel-Italy Chamber of Commerce issued an appeal — via Twitter — that the two companies "keep up collaboration." The tweet suggested that the partnership would improve the "wellbeing" of people in the Middle East, "even Palestinians."

Natural allies

Mekorot has encountered stiff opposition to its investments in other parts of the world.

Just days after the Israel-Italy summit, Vitens, the largest water provider in the Netherlands, announced it was ceasing cooperation with Mekorot.
The Dutch government has been advising its country's firms to stop investing in Israeli settlements in the West Bank ("Dutch water company terminates relationship with Mekorot following government advice," BDS Movement, 13 December 2013).

A campaign has also been set up against Mekorot's involvement in the construction of a water treatment plant in the Buenos Aires province of Argentina.

"In Argentina, our organization, together with social movements, has been campaigning against Mekorot for three years," Tilda Rabi, president of the Federation of Argentinian-Palestinian Institutions, told The Electronic Intifada.

"Our struggle is against contributing financially to Israeli apartheid in Palestine and, at the same time, against the sale of our water to multinationals."

Groups working to defend the universal right to water from the logic of profits and those working to support the Palestinian struggle are natural allies. With the recent cooperation agreement, Mekorot has its foot in the Italian door.

Campaigners in Italy want that door closed. They insist that water services be delivered in a way that doesn't violate human rights.

"Israel's water apartheid embraced by Italy", 21/02/2014, online at: http://electronicintifada.net/content/israels-water-apartheid-embraced-italy/13187

BACK TO TOP

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❖ Palestinians need Israeli know-how on water desalination

Even Israeli Minister of Strategic and Intelligence Affairs Yuval Steinitz, who is not suspected of being overly sympathetic to the Palestinians, recognizes that the average water consumption of the Israeli settlers is twice that used by the West Bank Palestinians — with a daily per capita water consumption of 200 liters [52.8 gallons] as against 100 liters [26.4 gallons]. Steinitz talked about the issue with reference to the address delivered to the Knesset [on Feb. 12] by European Parliament President Martin Schulz, which caused quite an uproar. However, the explanation provided by Steinitz for this is that, in general, the standard of living of the Palestinian population is lower than in Israel, and that this is the cause for the large gap, rather than deliberate discrimination on the part of Israel, as implied by Schultz.

Under the Oslo Accord, Israel has been left with control (although not full control) over the water resources across the country. It currently supplies to the Palestinians more than 50 million cubic meters [40,000 acre feet] of water a year — most of the Palestinian annual water consumption. Over the years, since the signing of the accord, the water sector in the country has undergone some important changes. The first and most important one is the development made in this field in Israel: Large desalination plants have been built, and there has been significant progress in wastewater [reclamation and] reuse. In fact, there is no longer any water shortage in Israel.

The farmers are still skeptical about wastewater reuse

While Israel has made great advances, the Palestinian water sector has stayed rather paralyzed. The Palestinian water system remains failing. Wastewater reuse is uncommon and traditionally, there is still reluctance about wastewater reuse.

At a [Jan. 27] conference in Tel Aviv [held by Friends of the Earth Middle East and the Institute for National Security Studies] … it was noted that immediate action was required to resolve the water shortage, specifically in Gaza, as it was on the verge of a humanitarian disaster. There is not enough water in Gaza even for the most basic needs, and, as a consequence, childhood diseases are liable to spread in the Gaza Strip and reach Israel, as well. A report to this effect was published by *The New York Times*, among others.

One reason for the deterioration in Gaza is that no desalination plant has been built there. Due to political circumstances, there is suitable infrastructure in Gaza — energy facilities, in particular — for the establishment of such a plant. For one thing, the large gas field discovered off the coast of the Gaza Strip 14 years ago is still not utilized. To enable its [cost-effective] operation, Israel had to commit itself to purchase gas from the Gaza Marine gas field off the Gaza coast (however, at the time [in 2005], then-Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon decided to buy gas from Egypt instead). Alternatively, Israel has to allow the construction of a gas pipeline running from Gaza to the West Bank, and possibly even further on, to Jordan.

A recently signed agreement involving Jordan may change the situation

All that may change following the implementation of the first phase of the Red Sea-Dead Sea Canal project in line with the agreement signed two months ago [Dec. 9] between Israel (represented by Minister for Regional Cooperation Silvan Shalom), Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. Under the agreement, a large desalination plant is to be built in Aqaba, which is designed to draw out in the first stage 200 million cubic meters [162,000 acre feet] of water from the Red Sea — 80 million cubic meters [65,000 acre feet] of which are to be transformed into drinking water, while the rest would be flowed into the Dead Sea. Jordan is to purchase 30 million cubic meters [24,000 acre feet] of desalinated water, and Israel is to buy 30 million to 50 million cubic meters [roughly 24,000 to 40,000 acre feet].

The Palestinians are partners to the agreement since a quarter of the Dead Sea is located in the West Bank. And what's more, they will be able to purchase from Israel some additional 30 million cubic meters of [desalinated] water per year — an extra supply that would no doubt help to resolve the water shortage problem in the territories.

"Palestinians need Israeli know-how on water desalination", 18/02/2014, online at: http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/business/2014/02/israel-palestine-gaza-water-shortage-desalination.html

BACK TO TOP

❖ BGU study: Organic farming may pollute groundwater

BEER-SHEVA, Israel (Press Release)–Researchers from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU), using specialized monitoring technology, have determined that intensive organic agriculture in greenhouses in Israel can cause significant pollution from nitrate leaching into groundwater.

Public demand has led to the rapid development of organic farming in recent years to provide healthy food products that are free of chemical additives and to reduce industrial and groundwater pollution worldwide. But, according to the paper published in Journal Hydrology and Earth System Sciences, intensive organic matter using composted manure prior to planting resulted in significantly higher groundwater pollution rates compared with liquid fertilization techniques.

The study used Vadose Zone Monitoring System technology developed at BGU and commercialized by Sensoil Innovations Ltd. to compare the water quality across the entire unsaturated zone under organic and conventional greenhouses in Israel. The system is designed to monitor liquid, gas and soil hydraulic properties and allows real time continuous tracking of water in deep sections of the vadose zone, from land surface to groundwater. It is currently being used in more than 25 commercial and research sites in the United States, Israel, Spain, Namibia, and South Africa.

While groundwater pollution is usually attributed to a large array of chemicals, high nitrate concentration in aquifer water is the main cause for drinking-water well shutdowns. The down leaching of nitrates under intensive organic farming is due to nutrient release from the compost to the soil during the early stages of the growing season. In this stage, nutrient uptake capacity of the young plants is very low and down leaching of nitrates to the deeper parts of the vadose zone and groundwater is unavoidable.

The study, funded by the Israel Water Authority, was conducted in commercial greenhouses on the Southern part of the coastal aquifer in Israel.

The BGU researchers included Dr. Ofer Dahan and Dr. Naftali Lazarovitch of the Jacob Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research and Efrat E. Russak of the Department of Geological and Environmental Sciences, and Dr. Daniel Kurtzman, The Volcani Center .

"BGU study: Organic farming may pollute groundwater", 18/02/014, online at:
http://www.sdjewishworld.com/2014/02/18/bgu-study-organic-farming-may-pollute-groundwater/

BACK TO TOP

❖ Water consumption up 4.5% in 2013

Water shortages have been made up for by increased desalination, Mekorot reports.

Israelis have maintained discipline in water use despite expanding water desalination operations in 2013, and there has been a slight rise in overall water consumption, **Mekorot National Water Company**reported today. An analysis of data reveals that household water consumption in 2013 rose 47.3 million cubic meters, up 2% from 2012. The Mekorot data also shows that cumulative industrial water consumption rose 400,000 cubic meters in 2013, up 0.5% from 2012. Mekorot reports an overall rise of 4.5% in water consumption last year.

Mekorot CEO Shimon Ben Hamo said, "This is a moderate increase in water cosumption, which reflects a situation in which the tendency to save is maintained, despite Israel's entry into the era of desalination. It is quite possible that some of this is related to the rise in the water prices."

Ben Hamo explained the rise in demand for water for agricultural use, due to the problematic rains last winter - a situation that forced farmers to water many agricultural crops: "We have seen this situation in the past two months as well, which have been characterized by a very problematic rain pattern. Despite the fact that we are in a dry-spell, in terms of rain, an improvement in our ability to provide water has led to the fact that, today, no one feels the shortage, and we know how to supply water to the Jordanians and Palestinians as well. We have a much better, and much more reliable, water system than we did in previous years," he said.

The Water Authority said the rains over the weekend have raised the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee) by 0.5cm, from direct precipitation. A weak flow was reported in the Saar, Hilazon, and Beit Haemek streams. The surface of the Kinneret is currently 211.15 cm below sea level.

"Water consumption up 4.5% in 2013", 16/02/2014, online at: http://www.globes.co.il/en/article-water-consumption-up-45-in-2013-1000917652

BACK TO TOP

❖ The Israeli 'watergate' scandal: The facts about Palestinian water

Israel has adopted a drip-feed approach to providing the Palestinians with water instead of letting them control their own natural resource.

Rino Tzror is an interviewer who argues with rather than flatters his subjects. Yet last Thursday, he didn't do his homework and let Justice Minister Tzipi Livni throw sand in the eyes of the public about everything regarding the flap over water with Martin Schulz, the president of the European Parliament.

Livni was invited onto his Army Radio program as a sane voice who would criticize the behavior of Economy Minister Naftali Bennett and Co. toward Schulz (Bennett's Habayit Hayehudi party stormed out of the Knessetduring a speech by Schulz when he allowed himself to wonder whether indeed Israelis were allotted four times as much water as Palestinians). "I told [the EU Parliament president], 'You are wrong, they intentionally misled you,'" she told Tzror. "'That is not how the water is allocated. Israel gives the Palestinians more water than what we committed to in the interim agreements.'"

The very word "gives" should have lit Tzror's fuse. But Livni kept buttering him up in her learned tone, with her grumbles against the Palestinian position on desalinated water and the Joint Water Committee.

So here are the facts:

*Israel doesn't give water to the Palestinians. Rather, it sells it to them at full price.

* The Palestinians would not have been forced to buy water from Israel if it were not an occupying power which controls their natural resource, and if it were not for the Oslo II Accords, which limit the volume of water they can produce, as well as the development and maintenance of their water infrastructure.

***** This 1995 interim agreement was supposed to lead to a permanent arrangement after five years. The Palestinian negotiators deluded themselves that they would gain sovereignty and thus control over their water resources.

The Palestinians were the weak, desperate, easily tempted side and sloppy when it came to details. Therefore, in that agreement Israel imposed a scandalously uneven, humiliating and infuriating division of the water resources of the West Bank.

***** The division is based on the volume of water Palestinians produced and consumed on the eve of the deal. The Palestinians were allotted 118 million cubic meters (mcm) per year from three aquifers via drilling, agricultural wells, springs and precipitation. Pay attention, Rino Tzror: the same deal allotted Israel 483 mcm annually from the same resources (and it has also exceeded this limit in some years).

In other words, some 20 percent goes to the Palestinians living in the West Bank, and about 80 percent goes to Israelis – on both sides of the Green Line – who also enjoy resources from the rest of the country.

Why should Palestinians agree to pay for desalinated water from Israel, which constantly robs them of the water flowing under their feet?

***** The agreement's second major scandal: Gaza's water economy/management was condemned to be self-sufficient and made reliant on the aquifer within its borders. How can we illustrate the injustice? Let's say the Negev residents were required to survive on aquifers in the Be'er Sheva-Arad region, without the National Water Carrier and without accounting for population growth. Overpumping in Gaza, which causes seawater and sewage to penetrate into the aquifer, has made 90 percent of the potable water undrinkable.

Can you imagine? If Israelis had peace and justice in mind, the Oslo agreement would have developed a water infrastructure linking the Strip to the rest of the country.

***** According to the deal, Israel will keep selling 27.9 mcm of water per year to the Palestinians. In its colonialist generosity, Israel agreed to recognize Palestinian future needs for an additional 80 mcm per year. It's all detailed in the agreement with the miserly punctiliousness of a capitalist tycoon.

Israel will sell some, and the Palestinians will drill for the rest, but not in the western mountain aquifer. That's forbidden.

But today the Palestinians produce just 87 mcm in the West Bank – 21 mcm less than Oslo allotted them. The drought, Israeli limits on development and drilling new wells, and limits on movement are the main reasons. Palestinian mismanagement is secondary. So, Israel "gives" – or rather sells – about 60 mcm per year. True. That is more than the Oslo II Accords agreed for it to sell. And the devastating conclusion: Palestinian dependence on the occupier has only increased.

***** Israel retained the right of the mighty to cap infrastructure development and rehabilitation initiatives. For example, Israel has imposed on the Palestinian Authority pipes that are narrower than desired, forbids connecting communities in Area C to the water infrastructure, tarries in approving drilling, and delays replacing disintegrating pipes. Hence the 30 percent loss of water from Palestinian pipes.

***** 113,000 Palestinians are not connected to the water network. Hundreds of thousands of others are cut off from a regular supply during the summer months. In Area C, Israel forbids even the digging of cisterns for collecting rainwater. And that's called giving?

***** Instead of spending time calculating whether the average Israeli household's per-capita consumption of water is four times or "only" three times that of Palestinian consumption, open your eyes: The settlements bathed in green, and across the road Palestinian urban neighborhoods and villages are subject to a policy of water rotation. The thick pipes of Mekorot (Israel's national water provider) are heading to the Jordan Valley settlements, and a Palestinian tractor next to them transports a rusty tank of water from afar. In the summer, the faucets run dry in Hebron and never stop flowing in Kiryat Arba and Beit Hadassah.

All of this is intentionally misleading?

"The Israeli 'watergate' scandal: The facts about Palestinian water", 16/02/2014, online at: http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/1.574554

BACK TO TOP

❖ Report: Israel's Exploitation of Palestinian Water Resources

PLO- Negotiations Affairs Department issued on Sunday a new report entitled "Israel's Exploitation of Palestinian Water Resources", as follows:

'Israeli exploitation of Palestinian natural resources, including water, is one of Israel's most severe violations of international law. The Israeli occupation aims specifically at annexing Palestinian land, including our natural resources.

The World Health Organization recommends a minimum domestic water consumption of 100 liters per capita per day. The average individual Palestinian domestic consumption, at 70 liters per day, falls 30 liters below this minimum, while the average Israeli consumes three times the recommended minimum (280 liters). In the southern West Bank, there are communities that use less than 15 to 20 liters per capita per day.'

Link to Full Report http://www.nad-plo.org/userfiles/file/media%20brief/Water%20Statement.pdf

"Report: Israel's Exploitation of Palestinian Water Resources", 17/02/2014, online at: http://english.pnn.ps/index.php/national/6930-report-israel-s-exploitation-of-palestinian-water-resources

BACK TO TOP

❖ Amira Hass, Ha'aretz Publish False Water Charges

In a front page article in Ha'aretz (Feb. 13, 2014; click here for the cached version), Amira Hass claims that "Israelis – including those in the settlements – use three times more water a day in their households as West Bank Palestinians do," and goes on to charge, among other things, that this is:

just one aspect of the large discrepancy between Israelis and Palestinians in access, development and use of water resources ...

Hass is dead wrong about the relative usage of water by Israelis and Palestinians, but before getting into details and numbers, it's important to illustrate a deeper distortion in her claims.

What if, for example, one society uses most of its water for agriculture, in a very wasteful old-fashioned way, like flood irrigation of water-intensive crops, and therefore has only limited water left for residential use in households?

And what if, in contrast, a neighboring society saves water in every way possible, starting with low flow toilets and low flow shower heads, and it also invents and uses extremely efficient agricultural techniques like drip irrigation? And what if that society also recycles its sewage – say eventually it treats 78% of its sewage – devoting most of that reclaimed water to agriculture, thereby saving an equivalent amount of fresh water? And what if that society also builds some of the largest desalination plants in the world, turning sea water into fresh drinking water?

And if as a result of all these efforts the second society has much more clean water available for its people to drink, does that mean it is discriminating against the first society?

Obviously the answer is no, any claim of discrimination here would be nonsense.

But if the first society is the West Bank Palestinians, and the second is Israel, then Amira Hass's conclusion would evidently be that yes indeed, this is proof of Israeli discrimination against Palestinians.

In other words, just looking at basic realities, and without even examining detailed numbers, Hass's discrimination claims are nonsense.

Relative Water Usage of Palestinians and Israelis

Before making any comparisons between Israeli and Palestinian use of fresh water resources, one must take into account that total Israeli water usage includes significant amounts of treated sewage and desalinated sea water. For a fair comparison, this additional produced water should be subtracted

from the total amount used by Israel, so that Israeli use of fresh water can be compared to Palestinian use of fresh water.

If this is done the per capita consumption of fresh water for all uses by Israelis is 150 CM/year versus140 CM/year for Palestinians, that is essentially no difference.

If one looks not at all uses but only at domestic or household use, the Palestinian number suffers because of, as noted above, the large amounts of water wasted on inefficient agriculture, and also a further factor, extremely large losses of water due to leaky pipes. For domestic use of fresh water per capita consumption by Israelis (as of 2006) was 84 CM/year versus 58 CM/year by Palestinians, clearly contradicting Hass's reckless claim that Israelis use three times as much domestic water than do Palestinians. (For details on the above numbers see the article by Prof. Haim Gvirtzman.)

And one must stress again, Palestinians would have as much domestic water as Israelis if they didn't waste so much fresh water in extremely inefficient and archaic agricultural use.

Basic Facts about Middle East Water

Contrary to what Hass seems to want her readers to believe, Israel does not take "Palestinian water." Israel obtains roughly 50 percent of its fresh water from the Sea of Galilee and the Coastal Aquifer, both of which are entirely within Israel's pre-1967 borders. Another 30 percent comes from the Western and Northeastern Aquifers of the Mountain Aquifer system. These aquifers straddle the Green Line separating Israel from the West Bank, but most of the stored water is under pre-1967 Israel, making it easily accessible only in Israel.

Thus, even in the 1950s Israel used 95 percent of the Western Aquifer's water, and 82 percent of the Northeastern Aquifer's water. Today, Israel's share of these aquifers has declined to 83 percent and 80 percent, respectively. That is, under direct Israeli administration the Palestinian share of these aquifers has actually increased. (For sources and citations see here.)

In addition, every year at least 40 MCM (million cubic meters) of water from sources within Israel is piped over the Green Line for Palestinian use in the West Bank. For example, the major Palestinian city of Ramallah and surrounding Palestinian communities receive over 10 MCM of water from Israel annually, according to the Jerusalem Water Undertaking, the local Palestinian water utility. This accounts for about 83 percent of the water supplied by the utility. (The figure given on the JWU website is an average of 28,000 square meters daily. Aside from the typo of square meters rather than cubic meters, this works out to more than 10 MCM per year.)

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And despite the virtual declaration of war against Israel by the Hamas rulers of Gaza, Israel still sends to Gaza another 4 MCM of Israeli water annually through the Kissufim Line of the National Water Carrier, serving the Palestinian localities of El-Bureij, Moazi, Abasan, Bani Suheila and Khan Yunis (Statistical Data on Gaza Area and Jericho, Israel Foreign Ministry, June 1994).

Thus, contrary to Hass, the Palestinians are using Israeli water.

And not just the Palestinians. Despite its own meager supply, under its peace agreement with Jordan Israel provides more than 55 MCM annually to the Kingdom. Perhaps no other country in the world, facing the severe shortages that Israel does, has shared so much water with its neighbors, including hostile neighbors.

Palestinian Water Use Since 1967

There has been a vast increase in domestic (or home) Palestinian water usage in the West Bank since 1967, but this is reoutinely ignored by Hass, perhaps because informing readers of such facts would undermine her fundamental story line of alleged Israeli oppression.

In the period from 1967 to 1995 West Bank Palestinians increased their domestic water use by 640%, from 5.4 MCM to 40 MCM (Judea-Samaria and the Gaza District – A 16 Year Survey 1967 - 1983, Israel, Ministry of Defense, 1983; Arnon Soffer, The Israeli Palestinian Conflict over Water Resources, Palestine-Israel Journal, Volume 5, No. 1, 1998). By way of comparison, in the same 28 year period Israeli domestic usage increased by just 142% (Statistical Abstract of Israel 1996, V47).

This huge jump in Palestinian consumption was possible only because Israel drilled or permitted the drilling of over 50 new wells for the Palestinian population, laid hundreds of kilometers of new water mains and connected hundreds of Palestinian villages and towns to the newly built water system (Background: Water, Israel and the Middle East, Israel Foreign Ministry 1991; Marcia Drezon-Tepler, Contested Waters and the Prospects for Arab-Israeli Peace, Middle Eastern Studies, Vol 30, No. 2, April 1994)

Palestinian sources broadly confirm this picture. For example, Taher Nassereddin, Director General of the West Bank Water Department, has stated that:

[Palestinian] consumption for domestic purposes has increased as a result of population growth and that there were no severe restrictions on drilling new wells for these purposes. (Taher Nassereddin, Legal and Administrative Responsibility of Domestic Water Supply to the Palestinians, in Joint Management of Shared Aquifers, 1997)

It is important to note, however, that for political reasons some Palestinian villages and towns refused to be hooked up to the new water system, and they therefore may not have a reliable water supply today. Thus, as reported in Audubon Magazine, the West Bank town of Marda:

... like many West Bank villages and towns, had refused to hook up with the Israeli water system in the early 1980's, when Israeli officials offered them the chance. Doing so, the politicians felt, would legitimize the Israeli occupation. (Bruce Stutz, Water and Peace, Audubon, September 1994)

Israeli Water Use and that of its Neighbors

Far from being profligate with water, among countries in the immediate area Israel has the lowest annual per capita usage of fresh water: Syria's is 1069 CM, Egypt's is 921, Lebanon's is 444, and Jordan's is 201. (World Resources 1998-99)

It is also instructive to look at the trend of Israeli water use. In the ten year period from 1984/85 to 1995, for example, Israel's population grew by 32 percent, but its water use grew by just 3.3 percent, a sign of the country's great efforts at water conservation and efficiency (calculated from data in the Statistical Abstract of Israel 1997).

In contrast, during the same period Jordan's population increased by 59 percent, but its water use increased by 113 percent (Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Statistical Yearbook 1987, 1995).

Similarly, in this period Syria's population increased by 38 percent, but consumption of drinking water increased by 43 percent (figures for agricultural and industrial use were apparently not published) (Syrian Arab Republic, Statistical Abstract 1987, 1998).

International Law and Shared Water Resources

Many reports, including earlier articles by Amira Hass, have uncritically accepted Palestinian charges that Israeli water policies violate international law.

Such charges are groundless. The relevant legal norms are the Helsinki Rules (1966), as supplemented by the Seoul Rules (1986), which, according to a leading authority, may be summarized as:

Human conditions, i.e., the actual needs of the communities that depend on the waters, take precedence over the natural properties that exist in the basin.

Among the human conditions, priority is given to past and existing uses, at the expense of potential uses.(Eyal Benvenisti, International Law and the Mountain Aquifer, in Water and Peace in the Middle East, Jad Isaac and Hillel Shuval, eds., 1994, emphasis added)

Thus Israel's first and continuing use of these water resources is justified by generally accepted international legal guidelines. It is interesting to note that these same guidelines have been invoked by Egypt regarding the waters of the Nile (Egypt is downstream from Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, and a number of other African countries), by Iraq and Syria regarding the waters of the Tigris and the Euphrates (Iraq and Syria are downstream from Turkey), and by Jordan regarding the waters of the Yarmuk (Jordan is downstream from Syria). (Arnon Sofer, Rivers of Fire: The Conflict over Water in the Middle East, Rowman and Littlefield, 1999)

It is also interesting to note that relevant United States law parallels these international legal guidelines. In Colorado v. New Mexico , 459 US 176 (1982) and Colorado v. New Mexico, 467 US 310 (1984), the Supreme Court held that Colorado could not use water from the Vermejo River, despite the fact that the river originates in Colorado before flowing into New Mexico. The prior use of the river's water by farm and industrial users in New Mexico was held to entitle them to continued exclusive use of the resource.

Water Under the Oslo Accords

Under Oslo 2 (Interim Agreement, Sept. 1995), significant responsibility over water was transferred to the Palestinian Authority, including the right to drill wells at agreed sites. As part of the accords (Annex 3, Article 40), the two sides resolved that in the near term Palestinians would receive an additional 28.6 MCM per year, of which the PA was obligated to supply 67 percent. While Israel has supplied its share of additional water to the Palestinians, the PA has largely failed to do its part.

The bottom line is that virtually every charge leveled by Amira Hass is either flat out wrong or blatantly deceptive and Ha'aretz should immediately run a forthright correction.

"Amira Hass, Ha'aretz Publish False Water Charges", 15/02/2014, online at:
http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=55&x_article=2656

BACK TO TOP

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❖ Fresh water and old assumptions

Contrary to what Schulz was advised by his friend in Ramallah, Israeli and Palestinians per capita consume equal volumes of fresh water.

When European Parliament President Martin Schulz manages to check the facts on water allocation on the West Bank, he will find that Israel has more than fulfilled its international obligations under the Oslo Water Agreement of 1995.

In fact, while Israel was required to facilitate a 20 percent increase in the fresh water supplied to the Palestinians, that supply has been increased by 50%. This is the clear finding of the comprehensive analysis released by The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies of Bar-Ilan University (BESA) back in 2012, researched by the distinguished Hebrew University hydrologist, Prof Haim Gvirtzman. This report, which is readily available for president Schulz to study, is based on previously classified data.

The study reveals many facts that are little known and even less understood. Today, contrary to what President Schulz was advised by his young student friend in Ramallah, Israeli and Palestinians per capita consume equal volumes of fresh water. The study differentiates between fresh water and artificial, manmade water, focusing on the former, since this is the shared resource to be governed by agreement. Artificially generated water is solely within each authority's control, sanction and prerogative.

As Professor Gvirtzman documents, since 1967, Israelis have dramatically reduced their per capita annual consumption of fresh water, while the Palestinians have increased theirs. The global trend is for people to consume less fresh water because of increases in population coupled with declining water resources, and this is what, in fact, has happened in Israel.

Thus, in 1967, the per capita annual fresh water consumption by Israelis was 508 cubic meters, but by 2006 had been reduced to 170 cu.m. Over the same period, bucking global trends, the Palestinian usage had increased from 93 cu.m. to 129 cu.m. The Palestinians have increased their consumption of fresh water due to receiving a 50% increase in water allocation, illegally tapping into the Western

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Aquifer (rather than the Eastern Aquifer), digging illegal wells, and also because of ruinous rates of leakage (over 33 percent, according to the Palestinian Water Authority's own reports).

The Palestinians have recklessly failed to invest in their water infrastructure (hence the astronomical leakage), have failed to build more than one, solitary recycling plant, even though plants have been approved for all major cities, and even though there is an existing international fund of $500 million waiting and ready to finance these plants. The Palestinians, rather than build the recycling plants, elect to float raw sewerage out of Hebron, Nablus and other major centers, polluting the streams, the groundwater of the Mountain Aquifer, and the countryside.

The Palestinian Authority, in short, has acted irresponsibly. It has done little or nothing to modernize irrigation systems so that its farmers continue to over-water their agricultural crops by using the primitive and wildly wasteful technique of flooding. This, while the Israeli drip-irrigation technology is readily available, inexpensive and proven world-wide to be dramatically effective in reducing fresh water consumption while increasing crop yield.

The Palestinian leadership does not monitor individual water usage, has not built the legal wells authorized under the agreement, performs inadequate if any maintenance, and generally is oblivious of its prerogatives under the 1995 water treaty and its obligations regarding the welfare of its citizens.

The Palestinians claim that they are entitled to 50% of the fresh water between the Jordan and the Mediterranean, and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is quoted in Monday's Jerusalem Post as accusing the Israelis of demanding too much water – "12 times as much water as the Palestinians." But this claim is refuted by the terms of the 1995 Oslo Water Agreement, which preempts all other sources of international law. Nor is Abbas's claim validated by the new rules of international law which would have governed in the absence of the Oslo agreement and which can guide both sides in the peace negotiations.

I first read the Gvirtzman study a few months ago after I was disturbed to hear allegations similar to those related to Mr. Schulz in Ramallah. It occurred to me that I should study the matter before accepting recurring rumored allegations.

I find the Gvirtzman Bar-Ilan study to be very discouraging because it portrays a Palestinian conceptual framework which a Western-educated mind cannot readily grasp. Why would the Palestinian Authority not build recycling plants, for example, approved by the Israelis under the agreement and paid for by the Europeans? One reads of PA corruption and the fact that hundreds of millions of dollars in aid have been diverted. I recall reading – and this was years ago – that more aid per individual has been granted to the PA than was spent in Europe for the Marshall Plan.

But predilection to corruption would not seem to explain the failure to build at least some of these water recycling plants so vital for the Palestinians' welfare.

The Arabs, Jordan excepted, have refused to settle the Palestinian refugees or even their third- and fourth-generation descendants, it is claimed, in order to preserve the Palestinian refugee problem, and its asserted "right of return" as an insurmountable obstacle to a final settlement which would recognize Israel. On the assumption that Arabs care about their fellow Arabs and coreligionists, this is a severe and self-inflicted wound on generations of innocent individuals for the sake of a distant ideal. After 65 years, one would expect rational people to reassess the equation of cost and benefit and to reconsider the balance of pain and pleasure.

The sad story of the PA's water policy and behavior seems to suggest that we cannot seek to understand their behavior through our own cultural prism. One must question whether we understand our interlocutors and what makes them tick.

The author is an attorney in Israel and the US, and is the founding president of the Institute for Zionist Strategies, which seeks to strengthen Israel as the democratic nation-state of the Jewish People.

"Fresh water and old assumptions – Jerusalem Post", 20/02/2014, online at:
http://mideastenvironment.apps01.yorku.ca/2014/02/fresh-water-and-old-assumptions-jerusalem-post/

BACK TO TOP

Mithat Paşa Caddesi 46/4 Kızılay-Ankara TURKEY
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❖ Water torture for the Palestinians

Water discrimination is another tool being used to wear down the Palestinians socially and politically.

By Amira Hass | Feb. 18, 2014

Why is the Israeli establishment so bent on denying the existence of water discrimination? Because this time the Israeli establishment cannot wrap it in the usual security excuses it resorts to with other sorts of blatant discrimination.

When it comes to the water situation, the Israeli propaganda machine and its helpers, the Zionist lobbies in the Diaspora, are in big trouble. As was clearly shown when the German Martin Schulz had the audacity to inquire in the Knesset – that den of traffickers in the Holocaust – if the rumor he had heard was true [he queried whether Israelis were allotted four times as much water as Palestinians].

The systematic discrimination in water allocations to the Palestinians is no false rumor. Israelis' water welfare is not dependent upon it, but without it the whole settlement enterprise would be way more expensive, and perhaps even impossible to sustain in its current and planned scope.

No wonder Habayit Hayehudi, the party most identified with the settlers, reacted so furiously to Schulz's remarks and walked out of the Knesset.

Water discrimination is another governmental tool being used to wear down the Palestinians socially and politically.

In the West Bank, tens of thousands of families expend huge amounts of time, money and emotional and physical energy just to take care of basic things like showers, laundry, and washing floors and dishes. When there's no water in the toilet cistern, even family visits become rare.

Families in the Jordan Valley haul drinking water in tanks from long distances, and furtively – lest they be discovered by the Civil Administration – while they live right near the Mekorot Water Company's pipelines that convey plentiful water to settlement farms growing herbs for export.

Gaza, just on the other side of the late Ariel Sharon's Sycamore Ranch and Kibbutz Be'eri, is dependent upon water purification plants that guzzle electricity – often in short supply; it might as well be India.

The time, money and energy that go into obtaining water come at the expense of other things on both the personal and community level: enrichment classes for the children, a computer, family outings, industrial development projects, tourism development, organic agriculture, political and social activity.

While the Palestinians know that Israel is responsible for the water shortage, their anger is directed at the more accessible lightning rod – the Palestinian Authority.

And the employees of the Palestinian water authority, who spend their days in wearying battle with the Israeli occupation bureaucracy to obtain approval for every water pipe, are regarded as uncaring, unprofessional and inefficient. How convenient.

The reality of disjointed Palestinian enclaves that Israel is creating is emerging – through a different patchwork of laws and to different extents on either side of the Green Line – from the seizure of land and water sources, and the denial of freedom of movement.

The religion of security, which is used to justify the land theft, checkpoints and blockade, has yet to come up with an explanation for why a Palestinian child is entitled to less water than a Jewish child.

What can the public diplomacy experts say? That in Jenin the average per-capita allocation is 38 liters for home consumption, because the city is a stronghold of Islamic Jihad, which threatens our small country? That in the summer there is no regular water supply because the Shin Bet security service is busy uncovering cells of armed militants, and that in Gaza, more than 90 percent of the water is unfit for drinking because the Hamas chiefs are planning terrorist attacks in the West Bank?

Even the Jewish communities most dedicated to Israel will have a hard time justifying the discrepancies. And so the establishment has come up with a four-part plan of attack:

1. Bombard the media with partial and faulty statistics;

2. Blur the starting point: Israel controls the water sources. Based on the temporary Oslo Accords, which has since become permanent, the Palestinians are limited in the amount of water they are permitted to independently extract from these sources and in the improvements they can make in the water infrastructure;

3. Rely on the Israeli home front, which dismisses Palestinian reports and ignores reports from organizations such as B'Tselem – the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories and the documentary film "The Fading Valley" from Irit Gal, and studies published by the World Bank and Amnesty International;

4. Count on most Israelis not troubling to just take a look for themselves at the actual situation. And if they do, and find there to be outrageous discrimination, then count on them saying, "So what?"

"Water torture for the Palestinians" ,Haaretz, 20/02/2014, online at:
http://mideastenvironment.apps01.yorku.ca/2014/02/water-torture-for-the-palestinians-haaretz/

BACK TO TOP

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❖ Israel Cuts Off Water Supply to Several Homes in Jerusalem's Old City

JERUSALEM, February 16, 2014 (WAFA) – Israeli authorities Sunday completely cut off the water supply to 14 houses in the old city of Jerusalem, under the pretext of accumulated debts, bringing the number of houses without water supply to 44 homes, according to an official.

Ashraf al-zorba, responsible on following up on water issues in the old city of Jerusalem told WAFA that a staff of the Israeli Electric Company began last week cutting off the water supply to houses in Jerusalem; it cut off the water supply to 30 houses at once in two locations in the old city of Jerusalem.

He stressed the difficult situation of residents living without water for several days now; residents depend on neighbors to provide them with some of their water needs.

He said that the accumulated debts amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

He said that the debt accumulation of hundreds of thousands of dollars, in addition to millions of tax debts on residents are all methods Israel uses to displace Palestinians and force them to leave their land as an attempt to take over it.

"Israel Cuts Off Water Supply to Several Homes in Jerusalem's Old City", 16/02/2014, online at: http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=24353

BACK TO TOP

❖ Israel's Water Situation: From Abundance to Crisis

Late last year, we reported that Israel was facing an over-abundance of water after seven years of drought. It would now seem such predictions were premature, with experts warnings that the coming year could see Israel up against yet another severe water crisis.
The previous winter saw good rainfall, and the beginning of the current winter started much the same, leading Water Authority officials to put Israel's large desalination plants on notice that their full output would not be required in the coming year.

A massive winter snowstorm in early December (which is unprecedentedly early for snow in Israel) only bolstered predictions that Israel's cup would soon be running over.

But then came January and February, usually the wettest months for the Jewish state, and yet barely a drop of rain fell in most of the country. Little to no rain for the better part of seven weeks.

Water experts are now saying Israel faces yet another water crisis if some drastic measures are not taken soon. There are not enough months of winter remaining to make up for the lack of rainfall in January and February, and farmers are already eating into the water reserves that are typically only released in April.

The obvious solution is for the desalination plants to be switched to full output. That will certainly get Israel through the coming summer, but as many experts have noted, without a miraculous turn-around in regional weather, the problem is going to persist.

"Israel's Water Situation: From Abundance to Crisis", 20/02/2014, online at:
http://www.israeltoday.co.il/NewsItem/tabid/178/nid/24448/Default.aspx?hp=readmore

BACK TO TOP

Mithat Paşa Caddesi 46/4 Kızılay-Ankara TURKEY
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❖ Water scarcity among critical food security issues in Near East and North Africa – UN

20 February 2014 – The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) todaywarned that water scarcity is one of the most urgent food security issues facing countries of the Near East and North Africa, with fresh water availability in the region expected to drop by 50 per cent by 2050.

FAO's warning comes as ministers of agriculture and national officials prepare to tackle the issue at a meeting of the organization's highest regional governing body beginning next Monday.

Among the issues on the agenda for the 32nd FAO Regional Conference for the Near East and North Africa is a new Regional Water Scarcity Initiative, launched by FAO to support member countries in identifying strategies, policies and practices that promote sustainable solutions to water scarcity and related food security problems.

"The region has made significant strides in two decades in developing its water usage and storage capacities, but there is still much work to be done to improve water efficiency in agriculture, protect water quality, and address challenges related to climate change," said Abdessalam Ould Ahmed, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa.

FAO noted in a news release that per capita fresh water availability in the region has plummeted by two-thirds over the past 40 years, heightening concerns over the degradation of water quality and the impact of climate change.

Demographic trends are adding urgency to the issue, the agency stated. Chronic undernourishment in the region is estimated at 11.2 per cent, based on the 2010-2013 reporting period, while the population continues to grow at 2 per cent, almost twice the global rate.

Farming and other agricultural activities consume more than 85 per cent of available rain-fed, irrigated and groundwater resources, and the demand for agricultural products is expected to grow amid burgeoning urban populations and increased exports.

"Agriculture must be central to our responses to the challenge of water scarcity in the Near East and North Africa Region," stated Mr. Ould Ahmed. "Agriculture is by far the largest user of water in the region, but it is also fundamental to our survival and long-term resilience, accounting for some $95 billion in added value to regional economies."

Next week's conference, whose theme is "For a resilient and food secure region," will be the first of a series of meetings to be held in 2014 in each of FAO's five operational regions. The agenda will include issues like food losses and waste along the production-to-consumption chain, enhancing gender equality, and approaches to improving agriculture and rural development.

Participants are expected to offer guidance on priority areas for action, such as improving governance and institutions; giving more voice to farmers and other non-state stakeholders; and boosting efficiency in water use, both within and across national borders.

According to FAO, more than 60 per cent of the water resources used by countries in the region comes from outside of national and regional boundaries.

The pilot phase of the Regional Water Scarcity Initiative was launched in June 2013 in six countries – Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Tunisia and Yemen. It began reviewing the current status of water availability and use and the potential for further agricultural production.

It also began identifying and ranking options for future food supply in terms of both their economic and water-requirement costs, and, looking at the performance of agriculture water management and relevant policies, governance and institutional issues.

"Water scarcity among critical food security issues in Near East and North Africa – UN", 20/02/2014, online at: http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=47181&Cr=food+security&Cr1=#.Uwjy4eN_tb0

BACK TO TOP

❖ Middle East's Water Scarcity Seen as Food Security Issue

Water scarcity is one of the most urgent food-security issues for countries in the Near East and North Africa, with fresh-water availability expected to fall 50 percent by 2050, the UN's Food & Agriculture Organization said.

Per-capita availability of fresh water has dropped by two-thirds in 40 years, the Rome-based United Nations agency wrote in an **online report** today. Farming and other agricultural activity consumes 85 percent of available rain-fed, irrigated and groundwater resources in the region, the FAO said.

The countries of North Africa are all net grain importers, with **Egypt** the biggest buyer of wheat, data from the International Grains Council show. **Rising food prices** in the past three years have contributed to riots and uprisings that led to regime change in three countries in the region.

"There is still much work to be done to improve water efficiency in agriculture, protect water quality and address challenges related to **climate change**," Abdessalam Ould Ahmed, an assistant director-general at the FAO, was cited as saying.

More than 60 percent of water used by countries in the region comes from outside national and regional boundaries, according to the report. The FAO said it will hold a conference Feb. 24-28 to discuss a regional water scarcity plan.

Demographics are adding to the issue, with 11.2 percent of people in the region chronically undernourished in the 2010-13 period and the population growing at 2 percent, almost double the global pace, the FAO wrote.

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Nile Dispute

Violence has been linked to food prices for decades in Egypt. Attempts in 1977 to end subsidies on flour and other basic foodstuffs prompted riots across the country that left more than 80 dead before the government of then-President **Anwar Sadat** scrapped the policies.

Egypt's population of 84 million may expand by another 15 million in the next decade, U.S. Census Bureau estimates show. Based on the country's average wheat consumption, that would imply Egypt needs an extra 2.7 million tons of the grain a year by 2022. The country increased its domestic crop fivefold since 1977.

Ethiopia in January rejected a proposal that would guarantee Egypt the right to most of the Nile River's water. Egypt argues its 1959 agreement with Sudan that gave Egypt the rights to 55.5 billion cubic meters out of a total of 84 billion cubic meters is the governing document on the Nile's water. The rest of the river's flow was for **Sudan** or lost to evaporation. Ethiopia and other upstream nations reject the accord as they weren't signatories.

"Middle East's Water Scarcity Seen as Food Security Issue", 20/02/2014, online at: http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-02-20/middle-east-s-water-scarcity-seen-as-food-security-issue-1-.html

BACK TO TOP

❖ Ethiopia army voices readiness to pay the price for Nile dam

A host of Ethiopian army commanders have voiced their readiness to protect the country's multibillion-dollar hydroelectric dam project, currently at the heart of a major row with Cairo due to Egyptian fears the dam could threaten its traditional share of Nile water.

State-run television reported that military commanders had visited the project site, during which they had voiced their readiness to "pay the price" to protect the dam, which they described as a "national project."

According to state television, the visit – the first by military commanders to the site – came as part of activities marking Ethiopia's Army Day.

Relations between Egypt and Ethiopia soured last year over a plan by the latter to build its Grand Renaissance Dam on the upper reaches of the Nile River – which has historically represented Egypt's main source of water.

The controversial project raised alarm bells in Egypt, the Arab world's most populous country, which fears a reduction of its traditional share of Nile water.

Water distribution among Nile Basin states has long been regulated by a colonial-era agreement granting Egypt and Sudan the lion's share of the river's water.

Ethiopia, for its part, is determined to build a series of dams in order to generate electricity, both for local consumption and export.

Addis Ababa insists the new dam will benefit downstream states Sudan and Egypt, which will be invited to purchase the electricity thus generated.

Last week, Egyptian Water Resources and Irrigation Minister Mohamed Abdel-Muttalib said that Egypt was leaving "all options are open" in dealing with the project.

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"Ethiopian decision-makers must bring a solution to the table that won't compromise Egypt's share of water," Abdel-Muttalib had told Anadolu Agency.

Local Egyptian media recently quoted Irrigation Ministry spokesman Khalid Wasif as saying that Egypt would take its complaints against the Ethiopian dam project to the "international" level.

In response, Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn said his country would "win politically" if Egypt insisted on international arbitration.

"Ethiopia army voices readiness to pay the price for Nile dam", 17/02/2014, online at: http://www.worldbulletin.net/world/129079/italy-pm-designate-renzi-to-start-coalition-talks-tuesday

BACK TO TOP

Mithat Paşa Caddesi 46/4 Kızılay-Ankara TURKEY
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❖ Egypt: Sudan and Egypt Hold Meetings On Nile Waters in Khartoum

Khartoum — The Sudanese-Egyptian Permanent Joint Technical Commission for Nile Waters (PJTC) has convened its 54th regular meeting in Khartoum on Sunday.

The PJTC was established in accordance with the 1959 Nile Waters Treaty signed between Khartoum and Cairo in order to resolve disputes and jointly review claims by any other riparian nation.

The Sudanese minister of water resources and electricity, Mutaz Musa, welcomed water experts from both sides, expressing hope that PJTC holds fruitful discussions which results in achieving optimal utilization of the river Nile.

The Egyptian side in the meetings is headed by the director of Nile water sector, Ahmed Bahaa al-Deen, while the Sudanese side is headed by, Saif al-Deen Ahmed.

The two sides have entered into closed meetings to discuss all issues relating to technical cooperation besides discussing a list of joint projects submitted by Egypt to increase Nile water revenues and to provide the PJTC with the water balances of dams and actions related to the production of electric power.

Meetings would also discuss ways for developing and properly managing water resources besides looking into a new plan to expand PJTC's mandate and develop its work system in order to meet regional and international challenges to achieve water security for both countries.

The two sides will address the future role of the PJTC besides reviewing important researches and studies on optimal exploitation of Nile waters.

The 54th PJTC meeting has been delayed several times over the last two years due to political changes and events as well as last year's floods which hit most of Sudan's states.

Last year, Sudan departed from Egypt in the latter's campaign to stop building Ethiopia's Renaissance dam along the Blue Nile.

Egypt fears that the $4.6 billion hydropower plant, which Ethiopia is building on the Blue Nile, will diminish its share of the river's water, arguing its historic water rights must be maintained.

Ethiopia is the source of around 85% of the Nile's water, mainly through rainfall in its highlands. Over 90% of Egyptians rely on water from the Nile's flows.

In June, a panel of international experts who were tasked by the three countries to study the impacts of the Ethiopian dam on lower riparian countries, including Sudan and Egypt, found that the dam project will not cause significant harm to either country.

Cairo remains unconvinced and has sought further studies and consultation with Khartoum and Addis Ababa.

Sudan, however, has accepted the final findings and offered to send experts and technicians to help in the dam's construction, a move welcomed by Ethiopia.

"Egypt: Sudan and Egypt Hold Meetings On Nile Waters in Khartoum", 16/02/2014, online at: http://allafrica.com/stories/201402171578.html

BACK TO TOP

❖ Egypt to discuss Renaissance dam with EU ambassadors

Egypt's Foreign Ministry is arranging for meetings with ambassadors of European states to explain Egypt's vision concerning the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam which Egypt fears would affect its historic shares of Nile river water, official sources said.

The sources said the Egyptian side will also report on Ethiopia's intransigence in negotiations, as well as the negative impact the dam would leave on Ethiopia if the undertaking proceeds in its current form.

Ethiopia's decision to postpone power generation from the dam from 2014 to late 2015 is another example of funding problems, the source added.

The source said no contacts are being made with Sudan for the latter to mediate between Cairo and Adis Ababa, arguing that Sudan is fully aware of the propriety of the Egyptian position.

The source explained that the current structure of the dam is at odds with that previously agreed by Nile Basin countries concerning the establishment of power-generating mini-dams and other development projects in the region.

"Egypt to discuss Renaissance dam with EU ambassadors", 22/02/2014, online at:
http://www.egyptindependent.com//news/egypt-discuss-renaissance-dam-eu-ambassadors

BACK TO TOP

Mithat Paşa Caddesi 46/4 Kızılay-Ankara TURKEY
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❖ Is Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam?

Not only are there grave technical dangers to Ethiopia's proposed Renaissance Dam. It could prove an economic white elephant, writes ***Maghawry Shehata***

In a previous article on Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam I discussed a number of serious problems associated with this project. Specifically, I focussed on a number of geo-engineering issues involved in the construction of a hydraulic project of this size and reservoir capacity in the proposed location near the Ethiopian border with Sudan and the potential dangers these issues pose, if not properly addressed, to Sudan and Egypt, as well as to Ethiopia itself. Today, I will focus briefly on the economic feasibility of the project and its funding, drawing on available information and statistics, particularly those furnished by Ethiopia.

It is well known that a number of international agencies have been assisting Ethiopia in the construction of some of its dams. For example, the World Bank granted $331 million to help fund the Gilgel Gibe I Dam the construction of which was carried out by the Italian Salini firm. The Salini construction company was also awarded the contracts to build the Gilgel Gibe II and Gilgel Gibe III dams on the Omo River, the former funded by Italy and the European Investment Bank (EIB), the latter by the Ethiopian government. China funded the construction of the Tekeze Dam on the Atbara River at the cost of $365 million and carried out by the Sinohydro Corporation. China is also funding the construction of five other dams to the tune of $1.5 billion.

The construction of the Renaissance Dam is also being carried out by Italy's Salini construction firm. The Ethiopian government has stated that it would foot the costs, which are likely to amount to $10 billion by the time of completion. However, due to limited fluidity, Addis Ababa has had to issue a bond for this purpose, purchasable by Ethiopians at home and abroad. In view of the per capita income levels in the country, raising this money domestically may prove difficult. It appears that Ethiopia has few alternatives. Either it can persist in its obstinate determination to build a dam of this size and pour into it huge sums of money which will detract from budgetary allocations for all other areas of life (healthcare, education, food supply, agriculture, environmental protections, etc), or it can borrow from foreign donors. A third alternative is to accept partnership from the downriver Nile Basin nations (Sudan and Egypt). But Addis Ababa has rejected the principle of partnership, while Egypt, for its part, has stipulated a number of conditions for partnership, the foremost being that

Ethiopia abandon the idea of a mega-dam with such ambitious specifications and which will pose certain dangers not only for Egypt and Sudan, but for Ethiopia itself.

Recently, Turkey attempted to insert itself into the equation. During a visit to Ethiopia, the Turkish foreign minister announced that Ankara was willing to support the Renaissance Dam's construction. Most likely, any package would include funding from Qatar, in view of Ankara and Doha's shared hostility, at present, towards Egypt and the Egyptian people.

Such international political questions aside, a number of domestic economic and political questions surround over the Renaissance Dam. Some have questioned the cost-effectiveness of the project, especially in light of technical studies that point to construction risks as well as to a large loss factor in the energy generated by the dam — that the actual power generated by the Renaissance generators will be only 30 per cent of its theoretical production capacity, in contrast to 40 to 60 per cent rates for smaller hydroelectric plants in Ethiopia. Such problems have led many Ethiopian experts and commentators to question the value of the project for the Ethiopian people. Writing in one of the most widely circulating newspapers in Ethiopia, the prominent Ethiopian writer Barkout Bouhash openly wondered whether the Renaissance Dam would bring all the political and economic gains that the government claimed it would or whether the claims were no more than slogans. He pointed out that the government had never furnished the public with any concrete details. Another question of transparency — or the lack thereof — hovers over the dam. The construction contract was awarded without a competitive bid to Salini which, moreover, has a record of demanding amendments to contracts in light of technical obstacles entailing huge hikes in costs.

In view of the numerous flaws and mistakes that are already known to exist in the plans for the dam, the costs are certain to far exceed current projections. That construction will not be completed by the scheduled time, will further complicate matters for the Ethiopian government which has been working to obtain various strategic advantages, over Egypt in particular, and has planned accordingly. Meanwhile, Cairo has offered Addis ways out of its impending problems. Egyptian experts have proposed numerous alternatives that would enable Ethiopia to meet its energy and development needs, but Addis rejected these out of hand. Nevertheless, Egypt has the responsibility to approach the Renaissance Dam question with good will, in keeping with international rules and conventions, even as its patience has worn thin during the various negotiating phases. Still, in addition to continuing to propose alternative solutions, Egypt must simultaneously address the international community, alerting it to Addis Ababa's lack of

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cooperativeness and to the grave dangers its Renaissance Dam project poses to Egyptian water and food security and to the safety and well-being of the Egyptian people.

The Egyptian minister for water resources and irrigation has responded to his Ethiopian counterpart's invitation to discuss the pending problems. Hopefully, this time the dialogue will prove constructive and not another attempt to buy time.

"Is Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam viable?", 20/02/2014, online at: http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/5487/21/Is-Ethiopia%E2%80%99s-Renaissance-Dam-viable-.aspx

BACK TO TOP

Mithat Paşa Caddesi 46/4 Kızılay-Ankara TURKEY
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❖ Egypt: Sudan Foreign Minister Criticises Egypt Over Ethiopian Dam Dispute

Khartoum — Sudanese foreign minister Ali Karti has criticised Egypt for its handling of a dispute involving the construction of a massive dam project in Ethiopia, which it has vehemently opposed over concerns it could disrupt water flows from the Nile river.

Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, when completed, will reduce the capacity of the Aswan High Dam, helping to save about six billion cubic metres of water. Image courtesy of Hajor.

Karti said Egypt was further inflaming the situation by making critical comments in the media, adding that Sudan would continue its efforts to bridge the gap between the two countries.

"The position of Sudan is clear and we have already called on Egyptian officials to take advantage of the central role that Sudan could play regarding the crisis, but the arrogance of the previous government did not allow them to accept this idea," he said.

"If there is a room for a role that Sudan can play then the atmosphere must be clear away from the tensions and the cries over the media that do more harm than good," he added.

Karti and Sudanese president Omer Hassan al-Bashir returned home from Ethiopia on Tuesday from Ethiopia, where they were participating in celebrations marking the 39th anniversary of the establishment of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Sudan played a key role in supporting the Ethiopian rebel group, who managed to bring down the regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991.

Bashir also held talks with Ethiopia's prime minister Haile-Mariam Desalegn on the sidelines of the events, which Karti said addressed ways to strengthen bilateral trade to serve their countries' interests.

Speaking to reporters at Khartoum airport following his return, Karti said Ethiopia and Sudan had agreed to open border crossings and activate existing economic and trade committees between the two countries.

He denied that Sudan is taking sides in the dispute over the Ethiopian Grand Renaissance Dam (EGRD) because of it has joint interests in both nations.

Egypt fears that the $4.6 billion hydropower plant will diminish its share of the river's water flows, arguing its historic water rights must be maintained.

Ethiopia is the source of about 85% of the Nile's water, mainly through rainfall in its highlands, with over 90% of Egyptians relying on water from the Nile's flows.

In June, a panel of international experts tasked with studying the impacts of the Ethiopian dam on lower riparian countries, including Sudan and Egypt, found that the dam project will not cause significant harm to either country.

Cairo remains unconvinced and has sought further studies and consultation with Khartoum and Addis Ababa.

Sudan angered its Egyptian neighbour to the north by accepting the final findings and offering to send experts and technicians to help in the dam's construction, a move welcomed by Ethiopia.

The Sudanese foreign minister is expected to travel to Cairo in the coming days, local media have reported.

"Egypt: Sudan Foreign Minister Criticises Egypt Over Ethiopian Dam Dispute", 18/02/2014, online at: http://allafrica.com/stories/201402191185.html

BACK TO TOP

❖ China to spend $330 billion to fight water pollution

(Reuters) - China plans to spend 2 trillion yuan, or $330 billion, on an action plan to tackle pollution of its scarce water resources, state media said on Tuesday.

China has a fifth of the world's population but just 7 percent of its water resources, and the situation is especially precarious in its parched north, where some regions have less water per capita than the Middle East.

The plan is still being finalized but the budget has been set, exceeding the 1.7 trillion yuan($277 billion) China plans to spend battling its more-publicized air pollution crisis, the China Securities Journal reported, citing the Ministry of Environmental Protection.

It will aim to improve the quality of China's water by 30 to 50 percent, the paper said, through investments in technologies such as waste water treatment, recycling and membrane technology.

The paper did not say how the funds would be raised, when the plan would take effect, or what timeframe was visualized, however.

Groundwater resources are heavily polluted, threatening access to drinking water, Environment Minister Zhai Qing told a news conference in the capital, Beijing, last week.

According to government data, a 2012 survey of 5,000 groundwater check points found 57.3 percent of samples to be heavily polluted.

China emits around 24 million tons of COD, or chemical oxygen demand, a measure of organic matter in waste water, and 2.45 million tons of ammonia nitrogen, into its water each year, Zhai said.

Over the next five years, China has previously estimated it will need to spend a total of 60 billion yuan to set up sludge treatment facilities, and a further 10 billion yuan for annual operation, the environment ministry says.

China is short on water to begin with but its water problems are made worse by its reliance on coal - which uses massive amounts of water to suppress dust and clean the fuel before it is burnt - to generate nearly 70 percent of its electricity while self-sufficiency in food remains a key political priority.

"China to spend $330 billion to fight water pollution –paper", 18/02/2014, online at: http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/18/us-china-water-pollution-idUSBREA1H0H120140218

BACK TO TOP

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❖ Mekong Delta to suffer fresh water shortage next month

An influx of saline water will flow 40-60km inland into the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta's coastal provinces next month, according to the Southern Irrigation Science Institute.

The intrusion will cause a shortage of fresh water for households to use during the dry season, said the institute.

The delta's provinces have begun implementing measures to control saline water intrusion, including closing sluice gates at river mouths.

Soc Trang Province has closed sluice gates in Long Phu and Tran De districts to prevent saline water entering rice fields.

The salt content of the water of the Hau River in Long Phu's Dai Ngai Commune now exceeds 0.15 per cent, according to the Soc Trang Irrigation, Storm and Flood Prevention and Control Committee.

High tides and strong winds last weekend have caused saline water to flow unexpectedly deep into rice fields.

Ben Tre Province has built dykes around fruit orchards in Cho Lach District. The province has also built a water supply system to transport fresh water from the Ba Lai Reservoir to Binh Dai District to provide fresh water for thousands of local households.

In Tien Giang Province, saline water could affect about 4,700ha of the winter-spring rice crop in the Go Cong Fresh Water Zone, local officials said.

Tien Giang plans to built 173 dams, install pumps at 178 sites and dredge 146 canals in rice fields to supply fresh water for the zone.

Nguyen Thien Phap, head of the Tien Giang's sub-department of Irrigation, Storm and Flood Prevention and Control, said fresh water from sluice gates for production and household use is now available.

The influx of saline water in the Tien River in Tien Giang will increase between now and April, according to the provincial Centre for Hydro-Meteorological Forecasting.

To ensure fresh water for household use in Go Cong Dong and Tan Phu Dong districts, the most likely to be affected by fresh water shortages during the dry season, Tien Giang will open 57 public taps at water supply stations to supply free fresh water for local people. The province has done this for three years.

"Mekong Delta to suffer fresh water shortage next month", 20/02/2014, online at: http://www.eco-business.com/news/mekong-delta-suffer-fresh-water-shortage-next-month/

BACK TO TOP

❖ Lao Dam Plan Threatens Endangered Mekong Dolphins

The Don Sahong dam Laos plans to build on the Mekong River could kill off the last of the Irrawaddy dolphins on the waterway, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) warned Thursday.

The already critically endangered population of dolphins living on a 190-kilometer (118-mile) stretch of the Mekong mainstream between southern Laos and northeast Cambodia will be further threatened by the dam construction work and changes in habitat it causes, the conservation group said.

The WWF called for a suspension of the 260-megawatt dam, urging Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen to request a moratorium on the hydropower project when regional leaders meet for a summit on Mekong River development in April.

"Plans to construct the Don Sahong dam in a channel immediately upstream from these dolphins will likely hasten their disappearance from the Mekong," WWF-Cambodia's country director Chhith Sam Ath said.

"The dam's impacts on the dolphins probably cannot be mitigated, and certainly not through the limited and vague plans outlined in the project's environmental impact assessment."

The WWF estimates that only 85 Irrawaddy dolphins remain on the Mekong. The Don Sahong project in southern Laos is located just one kilometer (about half a mile) upstream of the core habitat for the dolphins.

Already reeling

The aquatic mammals are already reeling from a low calf survival rate and are threatened by entanglement in fishing nets and subsequent drowning, according to the group.

Explosives that dam builders intend to use to excavate millions of tonnes of rocks in the area will create strong sound waves that could kill the dolphins, the WWF said.

Increased boat traffic, changes in water quality, and habitat degradation from the dam will also pose direct risks to the population, it said.

Most of the zone on the Mekong where the dolphins lives has been declared a protective area by Cambodia, which has banned hunting the animals and relies on them for tourism.

Call for suspension

WWF said it was calling for suspension of the dam project, which is slated to begin construction soon and be completed in 2018, to "allow decisions to be reached using sound science and in consultation with impacted countries."

The WWF and other environmental groups have raised concerns that the dam will block a key fish migration channel and pose a regional security threat for the some 60 million people in the region who rely on fish and other products from the river for their nutrition and livelihoods.

Laos's announcement of plans to build the dam in September prompted objections from neighboring Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, which said not enough study had been done on the impact of the project's downstream impact.

WWF urged Laos to consider other alternatives to the dam, such as the Thakho project proposed on a nearby tributary, which it said would have "far less impact" on the Mekong.

"It is not too late to suspend the Don Sahong project and consider smarter alternatives," WWF-Cambodia's technical director Gerry Ryan said.

"Not building the Don Sahong dam is not an irreparable blow to the development aspirations of Laos, or their ability to produce electricity, but building it will almost certainly cause the extirpation of their dolphins and threaten critical fisheries," he said.

"Lao Dam Plan Threatens Endangered Mekong Dolphins", 20/02/2014, online at:
http://www.rfa.org/english/news/laos/dolphins-02202014162740.html

BACK TO TOP

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❖ Government urged to start construction of Kalabagh, Dasu, Bonji dams

Agri Forum Pakistan (AFP) Chairman Dr Ibrahim Mughal urges the government to immediately start construction of Kalabagh, Dasu and Bonji dams to meet the water shortage and production of cheaper electricity. In a statement issued here on Friday, Dr Ibrahim Mughal asked the provinces of Pakistan to stop raising illogical objections on these dams as construction of new dams had become utmost necessary for the country.

These would not only provide cheaper electricity, help ending load shedding but also raise the availability of per capita water from less than 100 cubic meters to 3,000 cubic meters per person. He said that these dams would also save the country from devastation of Rs 100 billion caused every year by the floods. If construction is not carried out it would lead the nation into starvation and ruining of agriculture, industry and all other segments of the society, Mughal added.

AFP Chairman said that India saves 40 percent of its water annually and store in dams while we only store 12 percent of our water thus shortage of water is hitting the country. He said Pakistan also need to immediately start new dams for saving 30 to 40 percent of water.

"Government urged to start construction of Kalabagh, Dasu, Bonji dams", 22/02/2014, online at: http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/1155890/

BACK TO TOP

❖ NENA Region Faces Fresh Water Scarcity

Water scarcity will be at the top of the agenda next week when officials from the Near East and North Africa meet in Rome. The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization warns the availability of fresh water in the region could drop by 50 percent by 2050.

The NENA region includes Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria,Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

Agriculture ministers and others will meet on the new Regional Water Scarcity Initiative. The goal is to identify strategies and policies to help the region adapt to the freshwater shortfall. Water scarcity could mean food insecurity.

The FAO's representative in Egypt Pasquale Steduto said, "This region is already known to be very scarce – one of the most scare in the world. But we are observing that there is an acceleration, and there is an intensification of water scarcity that in the next 40 years will bring to the highest intensity in history of this scarcity."

The FAO reports in the previous 40 years "per capita freshwater availability in Near East and North African countries plummeted by two-thirds." Steduto says it's a complex situation.

"Several things are coming into play from the population [growth], but also climate change. So, we need to be ready to address all the challenges that will come and the region will face in the coming years," he said.

The U.N. agency estimates that agriculture uses more than 85-percent of the "available rainfed, irrigated and groundwater resources."

Steduto said, "There is probably enough water for drinking. But for agriculture – for producing food – there is not enough. There was never enough in the past. There will be much less in the future. So one of the major challenges is that agriculture has to be more performing. It has to be more productive."

In other words, countries must produce more food with the water that's available. The problem is the Near East and North Africa population is growing faster than the global average -- and along with it the demand for food.

"Due to the food crisis of 2008 – the volatility of the price and so on – the [countries] have been limited in production. They are the largest importer of food from outside. So they discovered

[themselves] very vulnerable to the [imports]. Consequently, most of the agricultural policy in some [countries] tends to increase the production inside -- the internal productivity -- because if you want more food, you need more water," said Steduto.

The FAO said the Regional Water Scarcity Initiative aims to identify and streamline policies in agriculture water management. It says these are policies "that can significantly contribute to boosting agriculture productivity, improving food security and sustaining water resources."

The initiative's pilot project was launched last June in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Tunisia and Yemen.

The FAO Regional Conference for the Near East and North Africa will be held in Rome from February 24th through the 28th.

"NENA Region Faces Fresh Water Scarcity", 21/02/2014, online at: http://www.voanews.com/content/water-scarcity-nena-21feb14/1856266.html

BACK TO TOP

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❖ AfriForum to start monitoring municipal water quality

Civil rights organisation AfriForum today launched its own national Blue and Green Drop Branch Project.

According to Julius Kleynhans, Head of Environmental Affairs at AfriForum, the Project is part of an initiative to test the quality of potable and treated water in the municipalities in its 125 branches across the country. "AfriForum will monitor the municipalities to ensure that the water is up to standard in order to promote the sustainability and conservation of this critical resource," said Kleynhans.

"If standards are not upheld, we will put pressure on the municipality to step in. If nothing is done we will take the necessary legal steps to ensure that a solution is found," Kleynhans emphasized.

"South Africa is facing a huge crisis as a result of the mismanagement of our water resources and its infrastructure, and this will no longer be tolerated. We need political will, efficient financial and infrastructure management, and the co-operation of communities in our municipalities to conserve this critical resource sustainably," Kleynhans added.

AfriForum hereby launch the #potable water initiative to make people aware of water quality and issues. We invite the public to act as watchdog and report water-related issues to AfriForum here or alternatively, indicate whether the water in your town is clean? SMS "Yes" or "No" to 32277. R1/SMS.

The project will test potable (Blue Drop) and sewage water (Green Drop) quality to ensure that national standards are upheld.

Local authorities and the media will be invited to accompany the test teams in order to ensure the validity of the tests. Water samples will be tested by independent SANAS accredited laboratories and results will be made available on 17 March 2014 to the media and the public.

"AfriForum to start monitoring municipal water quality", 19/02/2014, online at:
http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71654?oid=547466&sn=Detail&pid=71616

BACK TO TOP

❖ Govt to construct two dams on Bagmati river

KATHMADNU, Feb 21: During the dry season, around 80 percent of the water flowing from its tributaries in the upper wetlands of Bagmati River is used for domestic use, making the river virtually dead.

Experts say it really has adverse impact on the river ecosystem and further increases the risks of flooding in the low-lying and urban areas during rainy season.
In order to ensure that the water flows throughout the year and to ward off troubling situations, the government is all set to start constructing two dams in Dhap and Nagmati, at the sources of the river, and develop them as water reservoirs from where water could be discharged into the river during the dry season within the current fiscal year.

During the dry season, the flow of water in the river is already at a low ebb. But unfortunately, as the water is diverted for domestic use, the river gets dry. So, we are constructing the two dams in the upper land and use the dams as the recharge zone for the river. The water collected in the dams will be released in the river only during dry season," said Ashish Bhadra Khanal, senior Divisional Engineer at the Department of Irrigation. He is the chief of the National Bagmati Conservation Committee formed by the government for the construction of the dams and implementation of the Bagmati Action Plan for the conservation of the Bagmati River.

Under the committee, there are three government bodies--High Powered Committee for Integrated Development of Bagmati Civilization, National Trust for Nature Conservation and Department of Irrigation.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has provided Rs 30 million for the construction of the dams in the river.
The committee is going to construct a 24 meter high dam at Dhap with a total storage capacity of 861,000 cubic meters of water, while another 60 meter high dam at Nagmati will hold 8 million cubic meters of water.

"An official agreement between the government and the ADB will take place by this week. The

construction work will begin immediately after signing the agreement as the feasibility study of the project has already been completed," he said.

According to him, the dam at Dhap will be completed in two years. Similarly, the dam at Nagmati will be completed within five years.
"We aim to be able to release 500 liters of water per second into the river during the dry season, which means it would be fit for swimming. It will help recharge the underground water during dry season as well," said Gajendra Kumar Thakur, executive member of the high committee.

Rain waters will be collected in the dams to be discharged in the dry season.
Conservation efforts are currently underway in the Kathmandu Valley to restore the Bagmati River to its original shape, which has been virtually dead due to various anthropogenic activities.

"Govt to construct two dams on Bagmati river", 21/02/2014, online at:
http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=69950

BACK TO TOP

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❖ Update: Fahmy visits DRC and Tanzania

Interim Minister of Foreign Affairs Nabil Fahmy said the Nile River "should remain a source of cooperation and prosperity for the Nile Basin countries", warning against the river becoming "a source of struggle and tension" during a meeting with his Tanzanian counterpart Bernard Membe on Friday.

Fahmy headed on Thursday night to the Nile Basin Countries of Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo in a visit which reflects a "quantum leap" in Egypt's relationship with the African continent, said Foreign Ministry Spokesman Badr Abdelatty.

Fahmy is scheduled to deliver a message from Egypt's interim President Adly Mansour to the presidents of the two African countries. He will also head Egypt's delegation to the Common Market for East and South Africa (COMESA) Trade Agreement's 17th Heads of State Summit, scheduled to take place next Wednesday and Thursday in the Congolese Capital, Kinshasa.

The interim foreign minister's visit to the Nile Basin countries features a delegation of Egyptian businessmen keen on pursuing private investments in the two countries in the fields of energy and transportation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement released on Thursday that such investments are "largely welcomed" by both Tanzanian and Congolese officials.

Earlier this week, Egypt's Deputy Foreign Minister for the Water and Nile Basin Countries' Affairs Mohamed Hamzawy met with a number of Egyptian businessmen who have investments or an interest to invest in African countries. The ministry said the meeting was part of Egypt's efforts to "deepen its presence" in Africa, an inclination Egypt has adopted since the 30 June protests.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the meeting included representatives from private corporations specialised in energy, infrastructure and transportation, adding that those sectors are among the priorities of the Nile Basin countries and East Africa. The Egyptian government is "keen on helping our African brothers fulfil their developmental needs," the ministry said.

Ministry spokesman Abdelatty said that Egypt's participation in the coming COMESA summit comes "amid a strategic vision which aims to strengthen economic and trade relations between the trade agreement's 19 member-states." He added that the theme of this year's summit, Consolidating Intra-COMESA Trade through Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development, will open the door for COMESA member-states to make use of Egypt's experience in this field.

During his visit, Fahmy is expected to meet foreign ministers of member-states scheduled to participate in the summit. The foreign ministry said Fahmy will be portraying Egypt's vision for strengthening and developing relations with African countries as well as addressing the main regional challenges facing East and South African countries. The Nile water will be among the topics on Egypt's agenda, the ministry added.

"Egypt expects its African brothers from the Nile Basin countries to realise the grave importance of the Nile for us," Fahmy said during his Friday meeting with Membe. He added that Egypt depends on the Nile for over 95% of its annual water supply, making the Nile River Egypt's "only lifeline", unlike the rest of the Nile Basin countries.

Egypt's foreign minister said that both Egypt and the rest of the Nile Basin countries have growing needs for water, adding that such needs can only be met by mutual cooperation and "without harming the interests of Egypt".

A dam Ethiopia is currently building on the Blue Nile, a major tributary to the Nile, has been a point of contention between Egypt and Ethiopia, as Egypt fears that it will have a detrimental effect on its share of Nile water. The Egyptian delegation to Ethiopia, headed by the water minister, failed to resolve "sticking points" following talks on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam last week.

Abdelatty pointed out that Fahmy's visit comes in continuation to a tour the foreign minister began last September. He added that such efforts come in light of Egypt's foreign policy following the 30 June protests in 2013: prioritising cooperation with the African continent.

In October 2013, Fahmy participated in a ministerial tour of Nile basin countries, which included Burundi, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. During the tour, Fahmy said that Egypt's interim government is "re-positioning Egypt in its rightful place as a country of Arab identity and African roots".

Egypt's relations with African countries received a blow following former President Mohamed Morsi's ouster in July, following which Egypt's membership to the African Union Peace and Security Council was suspended. The ministry has repeatedly expressed its rejection of this decision.

Commenting on Fahmy's expected tour and other visits to African countries, Abdelatty earlier said that such activities prove that the African Union's decision is "wrong".

The African Union's decision was discussed during Fahmy's meeting with Membe on Friday. Membe reportedly said that Tanzania will make use of its seat at the union's Peace and Security Council to work on "restoring Egypt to its natural place and role" within the African Union.

In late January, the African Union (AU) High-Level Panel for Egypt "affirmed the correctness" of the decision. The three-man delegation visited Egypt twice in the months following Morsi's ouster. The panel met with the leading political stakeholders as well as civil society, business and religious leaders.

"Update: Fahmy visits DRC and Tanzania",21/02/2014, online at:
http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=69950

BACK TO TOP

❖ Drought creates political divide

FRESNO, Calif. (KFSN) -- The drought brought President Obama to Fresno for the first time and he called for a truce in the political water war.

"It can't just be a matter of there's going to be less and less water so I'm going to grab more and more of a shrinking share of water. Instead we all have to come together," President Obama said.

But it's been a battle between democrats and republicans from day one. On his visit to the Valley the president was accompanied by California Governor Jerry Brown who's initial response to the drought was, "Governors can't make it rain."

That lead Republicans to attack the Democratic Governor for not immediately declaring a drought emergency, and prompted a massive rally at the capitol. The next day Governor declared a drought emergency. It laid the groundwork the state and federal assistance.

But Republicans said it wasn't enough. The Valley's Republican Congressmen brought House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio to a dusty Kern County farm field. There he blamed Democrats and their support of environmental regulations for the drought.

"How you can favor fish over people is something people in my part of the world can never understand." Boehner exclaimed.

A short time later a Republican drought relief bill, aimed at overturning environmental restrictions whizzed through the House. Democratic Congressman Jim Costa of Fresno voted for the measure, but noted its major limitation, a lack of support from outside the Central Valley.

"We have to be mindful we are one state. While something may be politically popular here in the Valley it may not be able to gain support in Southern California or the Bay Area," Costa said

Costa then drafted his own measure in conjunction with Senate legislation drawn up by Senator's Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer. All accompanied the President on his visit to the Valley, and the President made it clear their legislation has his support.

"A bipartisan bill written by your outstanding senators, Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer as well as your own outstanding representative and almond farmer Jim Costa," President Obama said.

The legislation provides hundreds of millions of dollars in immediate assistance but no long term solutions, like dams, and it's not enough for Republicans.

In a written statement Republican Congressman Nunes said, "President Obama could have taken the lead in solving this crisis, but he is apparently more concerned with placating his radical environmentalist allies"

Republican House leader Kevin McCarthy of Bakersfield also criticized the President's drought relief plans, but did agree it was time to work together. Democrat Jim Costa sees that as an encouraging sign.

"Kevin McCarthy indicated that with the President's visit and the legislation Senator Feinstein and I introduced we ought to figure out where we can find those compromises and I think Senator Feinstein and I would like to sit down with Congressman McCarthy and see what can be done," Costa said.

Just as the Governor's options are limited, the President can't make it rain, but with his visit to the Valley, President Barrack Obama made it clear, he wants to help.

"This is something I'm very committed to. We are going to make sure to get it done," President Obama said.

"Drought creates political divide", 18/02/2014, online at:
http://abclocal.go.com/kfsn/story?section=news/politics&id=9426960

BACK TO TOP

❖ No deal: Suburbs say can't trust Detroit in water system negotiations

As officials sort through Detroit's voluminous plan to get out of bankruptcy, the suburbs appear closer to agreement on one key piece of Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr's blueprint – a 40-year deal to lease the Detroit water system to Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties for $47 million a year.

A Feb. 11 memo shared among suburban officials outlines in blunt language the many areas where suburban officials do not trust EM Orr's negotiating team. Portions of the detailed, 11-page memo indicate that Oakland and Macomb leaders fear that they are being scammed.

"I'm a little appalled with the deal that's on the table. It's such a bad deal," said Macomb County Commissioner Jim Carabelli, a Shelby Township Republican. "This … is some scary stuff."

The document lays out suspicions that the high-powered lawyers handling the negotiations for Orr have withheld or manipulated information about the Department of Water and Sewerage's legacy costs related to pensions and retiree health care, anticipated expenses for upgrading a neglected network of pipes and pumps, and $113 million worth of past-due water bills, mostly among Detroit customers.

Beyond a brief mention of Detroit's past political corruption problems, the memo also complains about a "gotcha" approach by Detroit, with EM representatives aggressively pursuing a quick deal under the guise that the suburbs will buy in "at any price" to gain control of the DWSD system.

Instead, the counties have balked at every step of the process as they privately wonder: "Can the city's representatives be trusted" to strike a fair deal?

By allegedly hiding financial and infrastructure problems, the document said frustrated suburban negotiators are asking "What haven't the counties found that will result in serious, adverse fiscal and/or programmatic impacts once discovered?"

Bill Nowling, spokesman for Orr, said that the memo that emerged from a 3-hour meeting of suburban officials on Feb. 11 "is dated and the city is hopeful it no longer reflects the counties' view of the negotiations." According to Nowling, a new bargaining session held on Tuesday was productive.

"The city took issue with the tone of the memo at the time it was written and believes it did not accurately represent the state of the discussions," he said.

"… Since discussions began, the city has provided current information and responded to the counties' questions to the fullest extent possible. It will continue to operate in a forthright and professional manner."

Detroit presented its long-awaited road map for climbing out of bankruptcy Friday, outlining an elaborate plan to restructure $18 billion in debt, demolish thousands of blighted homes and invest in the broken-down infrastructure that has made the city a worldwide symbol of urban decay.

But the proposal still faces numerous obstacles, and most aspects are still being negotiated in mediation sessions with stakeholders.

The ultimate goal for the water department is the creation of a regional authority that will oversee the system and relieve Detroit of billions of dollars of costs over the next four decades.

One high-ranking Macomb County official said that water service is the "lifeblood" of southeast Michigan and the governor and Legislature should step up and pay most of the costs associated with the proposed DWSD transaction.

"The state of Michigan cannot stand by and let a region that represents 40 percent of the population of the state and 40 percent of the economy of the state deal with an unstable water system," said Assistant County Executive Melissa Roy.

The memo was written by Oakland County officials affiliated with a study group that has been dissecting the offers and assertions by Detroit. Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel has said he may, in the end, favor privatizing the entire system and putting it in the hands of a contractor.

Overall, Gov. Rick Snyder called the first full bankruptcy plan "a critical step forward." But it leaves unanswered many questions, including whether creditors and labor unions will accept the deal or fight it, and how long that process might take.

It appears that Detroit's eagerness to separate the city from the water and sewer department, a massive system with more than 120 suburban municipalities as customers, may still face a rocky road.

"The DWSD," the memo said, "needs continuing, widespread reform – in financing, in operation and maintenance, in purchasing, in capital improvement, in technology, in personnel and labor optimization, and in service delivery."

"No deal: Suburbs say can't trust Detroit in water system negotiations", 22/02/2014, online at: http://www.macombdaily.com/government-and-politics/20140222/no-deal-suburbs-say-cant-trust-detroit-in-water-system-negotiations

BACK TO TOP