



ORSAM WATER BULLETIN

Weekly Bulletin by ORSAM Water Research Programme

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



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24 January 2017 – 30 January 2017

Racing against time to fortify Mosul dam's decaying structure

The Mosul Dam is being renovated and restored by an Italian company and paid for, \$450 million, by the Iraqi government. Iraq's agriculture and water resources minister recently visited the site of the dam to see the progress of the renovation.

The dam briefly fell to ISIS in the summer of 2014 but was quickly taken back by Peshmerga forces with help from the coalition forces. It was soon revealed that the dam was in a deteriorating situation which needed urgent work to avoid a disaster that could affect millions of people across Iraq.

Now with reconstruction underway, Mohammed Amin Faris – Head of Kurdistan Water Resources Department says: “The dam has been of benefit to the center and south of Iraq. It has great importance for the Kurdistan Region as well. There is a plan to move water from the Mosul Dam to Duhok Dam. It is a very important and strategic plan.”

UN's Lise Grande in Iraq said at a press briefing earlier this month that the dam has the potential to impact some 20 million people. The dam, she explained, has a strong potential for a catastrophic outburst and would be disastrous for both its capacity for damage as well as the unpredictability with which it would happen.

“Anyone who says a catastrophic outburst would be ‘Biblical’ – they are correct,” asserted the Humanitarian Coordinator, who is a trained hydrologist with a specialization in the particular dam that is in Mosul.

In response to the risk surrounding the Mosul dam, UN agencies have created an early warning system with the Iraqi Government and the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is developing an international response to assist the Government in the event of the dam's collapse.

27/01/2017 online at: <http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/27012017>

Water borders deal with Kuwait ignites political outrage in Iraq

An Iraqi government decision to enforce a 2012 deal with Kuwait to organize maritime activity at a common waterway has sparked a political and public outrage in Iraq that mounted to accusing the government of treason, with confused interpretations of UN resolutions regarding navigation rights at the bay.

On Tuesday, the government of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi ordered to proceed with the 2012 agreement with Kuwait to demarcate water borders and organize maritime activity at Khawr Abdallah bay. It stressed it could not backtrack on the deal without the consent of the Kuwaiti side.

After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Iraq declined to partake in United Nations-sponsored negotiations to demarcate water borders between the two countries, which prompted a panel

formed to address the issue to proceed with its own drawing of borders in 1993, Sputnik agency quoted legal experts as saying. The government's recent decision was an enforcement of a parliament legislation applying that border plan, they added.

But the government's decision was met with outrage among parliamentarians who accused it of giving up Iraqi territory to Kuwait.

Alia Nassif, an MP from the State of the Law bloc, a coalition led by Vice President Nouri al-Maliki, said "the cabinet voted for giving the canal to Kuwait and has allocated US\$750.000 to demarcate water borders though everyone knows it is a purely Iraqi property." She stressed that international resolutions do not address the canal, accusing the government of "deceiving the Iraqi people".

Awatef Naama, another MP from the "Reform Front", said the UN Security Council's 833 resolution gave Iraq "absolute navigation rights" at the creek, something which, she said, has been given up by proceeding with the deal with Kuwait.

Abdul-Salam al-Maliki, an MP from Basra, the closest province to the disputed canal, urged citizens at his constituency to stage protests opposing the agreement and to collect signatures backing "the independence of Basra" should the government stick to the deal. He said the agreement renders Iraq "enclosed" in the maritime sense, adding that the cabinet's decree "eliminated our sovereignty over the last waterway connecting us to the open seas".

But another MP, Amal Attiya, said the cabinet's decision was merely an enforcement of past UN resolutions. "(The decision concerning) organizing navigation was based on arrangements approved by the United Nations, and the rights ceded by the former regime," she said, referring to the regime of late president Saddam Hussein. "The Iraqi people are now paying the price for the rights ceded by the former regime".

29/01/2017 online at: <http://www.iraqinews.com/baghdad-politics/water-borders-deal-kuwait-ignites-political-public-outrage-iraq/>

Syrians Demand Punishment of Terrorists That Cut Water Supply

Residents of the Syrian capital demanded the punishment of the terrorists who cut the supply of drinking water to the city and handed a letter to Hadiya Abbas, president of the National Parliament.

After receiving the statement, Abbas told the press that such action is considered a 'war crime' and against 'humanity', adding that 'Syria will continue fighting until reaching the final victory.'

The letter from the villagers called on the Syrian Parliament to voice their concerns to the whole world and to the international community as to pressure the terrorists to end the war imposed against this nation.

A similar document was delivered to the United Nations representative here, in which it is warned that the water cut to five million people would lead to a humanitarian catastrophe,

which involves the intervention of the international community to pressure the sponsors of the terrorists and solve the present situation.

Since last December 20, extremist elements in the Baradá Valley area have sabotaged the water plant in the town of Ein Fijeh, the terrorists broke the ceasefire and truces implemented to allowed the entry in the city of the repair brigades and they also attacked members of the local reconciliation committees.

26/01/2017 online at: <http://www.plenglish.com/index.php?o=rn&id=8518&SEO=syrians-demand-punishment-of-terrorists-that-cut-water-supply>

Syrian army takes water spring near Damascus – Hezbollah-run media

Syrian government forces entered the village of Ain al-Fija near Damascus on Saturday and took control from rebels of a spring and pumping station that supply most of the capital's water, a military media unit run by Lebanese group Hezbollah said.

A monitoring group said the Syrian army had not yet entered the village, but was expected to under a deal reached with rebels who have been fighting to hold the area they have controlled for years.

The Wadi Barada valley where Ain al-Fija is located has become the most intense battlefield in the Syrian civil war and the disruption to water supplies has caused severe shortages in Damascus since the beginning of the year.

“The Syrian army has entered Ain al-Fija ... and raised the Syrian flag over the spring installation,” the Hezbollah media unit's statement said. It said this was part of a deal reached with insurgents, who under the agreement would depart the area.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said a deal was expected to take effect which would see rebels leave with light weapons for the northwestern province of Idlib, an insurgent stronghold.

The army had not yet entered Ain al-Fija, or taken over the spring or pumping station, the British-based Observatory said.

Syrian government forces and their allies, which include Hezbollah, have advanced on the area in Wadi Barada in weeks of intense fighting, seeking to recapture the spring and pumping station.

28/01/2017 online at: <http://www.iraqinews.com/arab-world-news/syrian-army-takes-water-spring-near-damascus-hezbollah-run-media/>

Afghan Authorities Accuse Iran of Using Taliban to Undercut Water Projects

Afghan governors in southern and western provinces charged on Monday that Iran is using an increasingly close relationship with the Afghan Taliban to target power and water projects on Tehran's behalf.

Hayatullah Hayat, the governor of southern Helmand province, told VOA's Afghan service that the Islamic Republic wants the Taliban to disable some of the nation's dams so that Tehran can get a larger share of water from the Helmand River. He cited classified Afghan intelligence reports forwarded to the Afghan palace and the National Security Council.

"Iran is seeking to undermine the development projects over the Helmand River so that it can continue receiving more water," Hayat said.

The Helmand governor accused elements in Iran's elite Revolutionary Guard forces of providing sophisticated weapons to the Taliban that could be used to attack government installations and infrastructure. He said several unexploded mortar missiles used by the Taliban bore an Iranian manufacturer's mark and were fired at the provincial capital.

The governor added that Iran's intelligence representatives recently met with local Taliban leaders in Helmand's volatile Garmser district.

Water scarcity an issue

Iran's Embassy in Kabul declined to comment on Monday when contacted by VOA. Tehran has denied the accusations of close association with the Taliban, saying it has close relations with the government of Afghanistan.

Water scarcity is a major issue in parts of Asia, and Iranian authorities have been pushing for a larger share of water supplies from Afghanistan which has been building dams for irrigation and power needs. The two neighboring countries signed a water-sharing treaty in 1973 which says that Iran shall not make claims to water from the Helmand River in excess of amounts agreed to in the treaty, even if additional water becomes available in the future.

Iran has voiced concerns that several water management projects in progress in western and southern Afghanistan, including Herat province's newly Indian-funded hydroelectric and irrigation project known as Salma Dam, may reduce the flow of water into Iran.

Water deal terms are set

The Afghan government has downplayed Iranian concerns and said that the projects will not affect the amount of water flowing into Iran. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said that Iran continues to receive its share of water from Helmand River and that the country cannot claim more than what has been agreed upon.

Some Afghan experts say that if Iran wants more water, it should cut a deal with Afghanistan.

"We know Iran wants more water than allocated to it in the water-sharing treaty," Wadir Safi, a professor of law and political science at Kabul University told VOA. "If Iran wants more water beyond the amount agreed in the treaty, it should consider buying additional water from Afghanistan."

The allegations of Taliban involvement in the water dispute comes as Kabul is becoming increasingly concerned about Iran's alleged meddling in Afghan provinces that border Iran.

The Afghan Senate last month ordered an investigation into Iran's reported association with the Taliban.

Access to weapons a concern

Afghan regional officials say the Taliban has recently increased its terror activities in various provinces.

“The abundance of new weapons and ammunitions in Taliban's possession has created many questions and doubts,” Asif Nang, the governor of western Farah province told VOA on Monday. Nang added that the Taliban can receive weapons “within an hour” from Iran, given the proximity of his province to the border.

Last month, Nang accused Iran of harboring Taliban families in its territory.

“Families of a number of high-ranking Taliban leaders reside in Iran,” Nang told Radio Liberty last month. “They live in cities such as Yazd, Kerman and Mashhad, and come back to Afghanistan for subversive activities.”

The Taliban's former leader, Mullah Akhtar Mansoor, was killed in a U.S. drone strike in Pakistan last year and was reportedly returning from Tehran after holding meetings in Iran.

24/01/2017 online at: <http://www.voanews.com/a/water-afghan-leaders-believe-iran-uses-taliban-to-target-projects/3689059.html>

Energy Ministry Denies Pressure from Water Lobbies

The Energy Ministry has declared that water schemes are only aimed at supplying drinking water and no lobby can force the ministry to green-light industrial uses.

Speaking to ILNA, Deputy Energy Minister Rahim Meydani expressed confidence that the ministry's policies regarding inter-basin water transfer projects cannot be influenced by outside groups.

"Implementing the government's policies is imperative and we promise the people of Iran that lobbies will not be able to put us under pressure to violate our own frameworks," he said.

Meydani pointed to recent reports that suggested water intended for household use in Khuzestan was being siphoned off by others for industrial purposes.

"Provincial officials were ordered to look into the matter immediately," he said.

The official added that the course of action is closely monitored and cannot be deviated. Following rumors about the violations in trans-basin diversion schemes in Khuzestan, the provincial authorities and the Management and Planning Organization were ordered to check whether the water is supplied for household use or not.

Short-Term Solution

Inter-basin transfer or trans-basin diversion refers to manmade conveyance schemes that move water from one river basin to another where water is less available, usually for development purposes.

According to Meydani, trans-basin water schemes aim to ensure the sustained supply of potable water until the groundwater withdrawal is reduced enough to match the rate of recharge of aquifers (the rate at which groundwater resources are replenished).

"That'll take around 25 years. We cannot abandon people for that long; they need drinking water," he said, adding that rural residents will otherwise leave their homes and move to large cities. However, that is already happening in provinces such as Khuzestan, South Khorasan and Isfahan. Environment officials and experts are opposed to the inter-basin transfer of water, arguing that these projects only offer temporary solutions that are not worth their environmental and financial costs.

Water experts have repeatedly called for policy reforms and advanced farming practices to tackle Iran's huge water shortage, suggesting that the root cause of the problem is mismanagement and waste, and not the shortage of the precious resource.

24/01/2017 online at: <https://financialtribune.com/articles/environment/58047/energy-ministry-denies-pressure-from-water-lobbies>

Iran's Water Crisis and Expansion of the Country's Uninhabitable Areas

Berlin was hosting a summit on Wednesday January 25, held by two science foundation's 'Heinrich Boll' and 'Small Media' to discuss Iran's critical water situation.

In their 160-page joint report on Iran's water crisis, the two science foundations have warned that "ever more regions in Iran are becoming uninhabitable."

Participated by more than 30 German environmentalists as well as academics from both Germany and Iran, the summit was aimed at discussing the 160-page report and the Iranian regime's role in such a major environmental disaster.

The joint report by the two European foundations begins with "ever more lakes and rivers are threatened by drought. There's also an increasing reduction in the depth of the country's groundwater resources", and while pointing to the drying of Lake Urmia, the report adds that "Lake Urmia, the biggest lake in the Middle East, has lost 12 percent of its area in recent years. This amount is equal to the area of Lake Constance (Bodensee) located in Southern Germany which, with an area of 240 square kilometers, is divided between three countries of Germany, Switzerland and Austria."

According to this report, what is referred to as Iran's environmental crisis is actually a manmade crisis. The report says that the main cause of the current crisis is the indifference and inaction of regime's officials and incorrect exploitation of the country's water resources.

On the other hand, Iran's too outdated irrigation technique has caused the farmers and poor peasants to suffer the most from water scarcity.”

Later in their report on Iran's water situation, Heinrich Boll and Small Media foundations add that “the rise of civil movements and grassroots activities in social media in recent years has raised the social awareness in this regard. The environmental activists, however, tend to intentionally hide their identities in cyberspace as there's oppressive restrictions in these areas as well.”

30/01/2017 online at: <http://ncr-iran.org/en/news/society/22054-iran-s-water-crisis-and-expansion-of-the-country-s-uninhabitable-areas>

Aiming for 24/7 water in Beirut

A delegation led by the World Bank visited an ongoing system of tunnels and pipes being drilled to transport fresh water from the Awali River in south Lebanon to Beirut as part of a project the organization is funding. The undertaking, expected to run into the hundreds of millions of dollars and financed by the World Bank, aims to provide a sustainable potable water supply to residents of the capital, including its southern and northern suburbs and coastal villages in the districts of Aley, Baabda and Metn.

“The Middle East is one of the driest regions and a major hotspot in terms of water security,” Guang Zhe Chen, World Bank senior director of the Global Water Practice, told The Daily Star during the visit.

“In Beirut, a growing population of locals and refugees is increasingly relying on scarce water resources from the north [of Lebanon].”

The project, which consists of several components including a series of tunnels, water treatment plants, reservoirs and a distribution network, aims to solve Beirut's chronic water shortages and ensure an additional daily potable water supply of 250,000 cubic meters.

The system of tunnels is set to transport water from the Awali River, which flows from its source in the Chouf mountains down into the Mediterranean near Sidon, to three central reservoirs in the Beirut area.

According to Chen, the organization has been working for several years in partnership with the government to make the “dream” of a sustainable water supply for Beirut a reality. “We have provided the finances, however we are a partner to the government and we want it to take the ownership of the project,” Chen said.

The construction of a two-section, 24-kilometer, \$200-million water conveyor tunnel was also financed by the World Bank and is being built by Italian contractor Cooperativa Muratori and Cementisti di Ravenna. According to the Italian Embassy in Lebanon, which joined Monday's visit with representatives of the World Bank, the project is the biggest project of this kind for Italy in Lebanon. Italian Ambassador Massimo Marotti said it is a “point of pride [for Italy]

and an occasion to explore new opportunities for collaborations between Italian and Lebanese companies elsewhere in the region.”

At present, a team of 260 workers are constructing the water conveyor tunnel, which is expected to be completed in 2019. This will include a 4-kilometer tunnel for untreated water from the Chouf town of Joun to a new water treatment plant being built nearby in Wardanieh, and a treated-water tunnel from Wardanieh to the Metn town of Khaldeh approximately 20 kilometers away.

The Wardanieh water treatment plant is set to be built over two phases. The first, currently under construction by the Greater Beirut and Mount Lebanon Water Establishment, aims to provide some 250,000 cubic meters per day.

A second phase will be constructed under another World Bank-financed project – the Water Supply Augmentation Project (Bisri Project) – and will increase the total project’s flow to 500,000 cubic meters per day.

According to Randa Daher, project director of the Greater Beirut Water Supply Project at the World Bank, the final goal is to guarantee 24/7 water availability to the Greater Beirut area, where water is now rationed and available for three hours per day. “We will also provide water to refugee camps [in the outskirts of Beirut], but distribution will be managed by [the relevant] U.N. agencies,” Daher told The Daily Star.

The water system is set to become fully functional by 2022, when the treatment plants and distribution network will be completed with additional funding by the World Bank. This will include the construction of three central water bulk storage reservoirs along with a pipeline connecting the reservoirs in both the Bsharri area of Hadath and the Baabda area of Hazmieh near Beirut.

The project also foresees the expropriation of 570 hectares of land in the proximity of the Bisri Dam, which lies in between the Jezzine and Chouf districts. According to figures provided by a representative of Lebanon’s Council for Development and Reconstruction, 30 percent of the designated land on the side of Jezzine and 70 percent on the side of the Chouf are being acquired from land owners.

This concerns around 100 families living in the area and around 900 who own land. Among those living in the area are Syrian refugees who will be moved to nearby camps with the assistance of the U.N. refugee agency UNHCR.

Representatives from both the World Bank and the CDR stressed that all people concerned will receive adequate compensation, including monetary reimbursement and water supplies to develop their activities and increase land values.

The realization of the Greater Beirut Water Supply Project is regarded as a necessary step following the growth of Beirut’s population, which is expected to reach 1.9 million residents – approximately 40 percent of Lebanon’s population – by 2035.

In 2016, Lebanon saw less-than-average rainfall, leading to frequent water shortages. As future forecasts expect average rainfall to remain low in the coming decades, redistributing the water available in other parts of Lebanon is seen as one of the only options to relieve the capital of its persistent water problems.

24/01/2017 online at:

https://www.zawya.com/mena/en/story/Work_underway_for_sustainable_water_supply_system_in_Beirut-DS24012017_dsart-390695/

Egypt's thawing relations with the Nile Basin Initiative: What you need to know

The Nile Basin Initiative is currently preparing a delegation to visit Cairo to discuss Egypt's possible return to the regional grouping after seven years of inactivity, the initiative's head said.

"Hopefully by March, the NBI can send the delegation if formed, and successful talks would depend on the Egyptian authorities," Innocent Ntabana, the executive director of the initiative, told Ahram Online by phone earlier this month from Entebbe.

Egypt froze its participation in the bloc in 2010, but last July, Egyptian Irrigation Minister Mohamed Abdel Ati attended the 24th annual meeting of the NBI's Nile Council of Ministers (Nile-Com) in Uganda, a move viewed as partial return of the northern African nation to active participation in the group.

From the perspective of many Egyptians, neither the minister's move nor the NBI's anticipated visit to Cairo have been that significant, due to their lack of information about the Nile states' relations.

The initiative was launched in February 1999 by nine African countries with the aim of creating an intergovernmental partnership and providing "a forum for consultation and coordination among the Basin States for the sustainable management and development of the shared Nile water and related resources for win-win benefits," according to the initiative official website.

The founding members were Burundi, the DRC, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. Sudan has subsequently divided into two separate countries, both of which are now members of the grouping.

Despite many Egyptians knowing little about the NBI itself, they do name Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia as among the members of the organization.

The ongoing conflict over Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam, which Egypt has reservations about, has been heavily reported by the Egyptian media for several years.

"I am not surprised, and am not sure about the knowledge of the rest of the basin population over the Nile, but they are highlighting the conflicts, then that is because the media doesn't focus on the cooperation and the benefits out of the partnership," Ntabana told Ahram Online.

Egypt's concerns over the CFA

In 2010, five of the Nile Basin Initiative members adopted a treaty called the Cooperative Framework Agreement.

The CFA stipulates, among its principals, an equitable and reasonable utilization of the waters of the Nile River.

Egypt and Sudan declined to sign the agreement, citing disagreements over Article 14(b) which requires members "not to significantly affect the water security of any other Nile Basin States."

It was this disagreement over the CFA that led Egypt to suspend its full participation in the NBI.

Cairo argues that Egypt has historical rights to use the Nile water that were not taken into consideration by the CFA, said John Nyaoro, the NBI's former head during the initiative's media training held in Kigali last month.

According to NBI, 95 percent of Egypt's population "lives along its banks, and the Nile accounts for nearly all of Egypt's drinking and irrigation water."

Egypt has also demanded a clear phrase about prior notification for other members of planned measures by any of the NBI states, Nyaoro said.

"All our development partners would want an all-inclusive NBI, where the basin states are participating. So even when one country -not just Egypt- is out, saying that it isn't satisfied with an issue, the partners would want the NBI states to consider and look into that issue," Nyaoro said.

"Egypt's current stance toward the NBI is legal, and the participation will be remained frozen until the issues raised can be solved," Walid Haqeqi, the Egyptian irrigation ministry's spokesman, told Ahram Online.

"What we care about is to reassure Egyptians over their water security," said Haqeqi.

Haqeqi elaborated that freezing activities within the initiative does not affect Egyptian bilateral relations with the NBI members themselves.

Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi stressed last month to water and irrigation ministers from a number of Nile basin countries the importance of reaching a consensus on the CFA, which aims to guarantee the rights and water security of all countries along the river.

El-Sisi has been attempting to bolster Egypt's relations with African nations over recent months, visiting Uganda, Rwanda and receiving the South Sudanese President Salva Kiir in Cairo to discuss the current situation in his country.

“The ministry is yet to receive an official notification from the NBI regarding its delegation’s visit to Cairo, but Egypt welcomes any move that could solve the CFA issues, and the minister said so at the last meeting he attended,” he concluded.

"I would like to seize this opportunity to reaffirm Egypt's sincere will to continue and build upon what we started in 1999, putting aside all the challenges and misunderstandings that may hinder our regional cooperation," Egyptian water resources and irrigation minister Mohamed Abdel Ati was quoted as saying during the Nile-Com annual meeting.

Egypt needs to diversify its demands on the table to make the issue easier to negotiate, because with only one single item on the table, the talks would become very rigid, Ana Cascao, a programme manager at the Stockholm International Water Institute told Ahram Online on the sidelines of a workshop held in Sudan last month.

“In order to have Egypt back to the NBI family, there is a need for it to show openness to compromise as this could also influence the willingness of others to compromise," Cascao said.

The CFA versus bilateral treaties

“Egypt and Sudan’s fears over their historical rights to use the Nile water are exaggerated,” Salman Salman, a former World Bank advisor on water law told Ahram Online last month in Kigali.

Egypt signed a bilateral agreement with Great Britain, on behalf of its colony Sudan, in 1929, which was then supplemented by another accord in 1959 between Egypt and independent Sudan; under these treaties Cairo has the right to a water share of 55.5 billion cubic meters a year, the lion's share of the river's total flow of around 84 billion cubic meters, while Sudan has the rest.

Salman explained that there is no contradiction between the downstream countries’ historical rights and the CFA principal of an equitable and reasonable utilization of the water.

“The South Sudanese swamps are the factor that sets the flow rate of the Nile, nothing else,” Salman told Ahram Online.

The White Nile travels through the South Sudanese Sudd wetlands, and much water is lost to evaporation.

Previous attempts to build a canal to divert the White Nile away from the vast swamps, to raise the flow of the river, have failed, as local communities rely on these wetlands.

“Egypt has accepted the GERD itself, so why does it reject the CFA?” wondered Salman.

In 2015, Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan signed a Declaration of principals in Khartoum on the sharing of Nile waters and the GERD, include giving priority to downstream countries for electricity generated by the dam and providing compensation for any damages.

Last September in Khartoum, the three countries signed contract with the French engineering consultancy Artelia and BRL groups to study the impacts of the GERD on the downriver states.

Sudan's return to the fold

“Sudan came back to the NBI in early 2012, believing in its strong commitment to cooperation and the benefits of being part of the Nile Basin fraternity,” said Seifedin Hamad, the former minister of water resources of Sudan.

Hamad had prepared a paper--unveiled last month in Kigali--summarizing Sudan’s benefits from resuming its activities with the African initiative and “urging the development partners to play a major and effective role in bridging the gap between Egypt and other Nile Basin countries.”

The paper, obtained by Ahram Online, listed thirteen points explaining the Sudanese experience of unfreezing its participation in the NBI.

Hamad notes among them that: “when absent your voice will not be heard, whereas if you are present you observe and acknowledge the interests of others and others will observe your interests.”

24/01/2017 online at: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/256450/Egypt/Politics-/Egypts-thawing-relations-with-the-Nile-Basin-Initi.aspx>

Over 90 percent of water in besieged Gaza unfit for use: Official

A Palestinian official and local residents have expressed deep concern over the worsening clean water shortage in the Gaza Strip, stating that only a small number of the Palestinians in the besieged coastal enclave have access to drinking water.

Rebhy al-Sheikh, the deputy chairman of the Palestinian Water Authority, said on Thursday that more than 90 percent of the water in the aquifer in Gaza is unfit for domestic use.

Aquifers are Gaza's primary water source and provide for 98% of public consumption. Locals and development specialists say the situation is getting beyond dire across the besieged Palestinian enclave.

Residents say the water from the tap is barely usable, while those that can afford it buy bottled water.

Marwan An-Najar, a Gazan who travels four kilometers (2.5 miles) to fill a 20-liter plastic jerry can at a local desalination station, said he has not tasted sweet tap water in 10 years.

Najar, a father of six, while queuing to get water at the desalination station in Khan Younis said, "The (tap) water is salty, as if it came straight from the sea. We have stopped drinking it."

Commenting on water crisis across Gaza, Fathy Mhareb, a 60-year-old unemployed father of eight said, "It is not even fit for the animals to drink. We buy sweet water and use the salty water to shower."

The Gaza Strip, which has been under an Israeli siege since June 2007, has long suffered severe water problems. Its aquifer has been contaminated by sewage, chemicals and seawater and the territory's three desalination plants are unable to meet demand.

The Israeli blockade has also led to a dramatic decline in the standards of living as well as substantial levels of unemployment and poverty.

Adnan Ghosheh, a senior water and sanitation specialist with the World Bank, stated in November that only 10 percent of Palestinians in the blockaded enclave have access to drinking water.

The official with the international financial institution also reiterated earlier United Nations warnings that the Gaza Strip could be "uninhabitable" in less than five years on current trends.

Director of Operations for United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the Gaza Strip, Bo Schack, warned in October that the Israeli blockade and restrictions on the entry of construction materials into the enclave "are negatively impacting the lives of Palestinians there."

He said Israeli actions are hindering peace and stability in the Gaza Strip, calling for measures to alleviate the sufferings of the Gazans.

Israel launched its latest war on the Gaza Strip in early July 2014. The 50-day military aggression, which ended on August 26, 2014, killed nearly 2,200 Palestinians, including 577 children. Over 11,100 others — including 3,374 children, 2,088 women and 410 elderly people — were also wounded in the war.

26/01/2017 online at: <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2017/01/26/507883/Palestine-Gaza-Rebhy-alSheikh-Israel>

FAO Presents NENA Water Scarcity Initiative

At a technical briefing on the water-food nexus held at UN Headquarters in New York, US, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) presented the FAO-NENA (Near East and North Africa) Water Scarcity Initiative. The Initiative provides a comprehensive framework to ensure the sustainable use and preservation of scarce water resources in the region.

The FAO Regional Water Scarcity Initiative was formulated in response to a request of the FAO NENA Regional Conference, which identified the issue as a central priority for Member States. The Initiative, which falls under FAO's strategic programme for sustainable food production, supports NENA countries in their pursuit of food and water security during an unprecedented and severe escalation of water scarcity. It aims to identify critical areas

requiring action; assist in the formulation of a regional collaborative strategy; and build broad partnerships to support its implementation.

During the briefing, titled ‘the water-food nexus: Tackling water scarcity in the context of sustainable development,’ which took place on 25 January, participants discussed ways to address the dilemma of food production in the context of water scarcity. Pasquale Steduto, FAO Regional Strategic Programmes Coordinator for NENA, introduced the Initiative. He explained that it aims to assist NENA countries in: water accounting and monitoring, by looking at sources, users, consumption and re-users; strategic planning for setting the safe boundary for consumption; and maximizing the benefits of each drop of allocated water, including through technology and governance. He highlighted that the Initiative reduced water application for irrigation by 25%, reduced seed application at sowing by 50%, increased fertilizer use efficiency by 30% and increased wheat yields by 25%.

Tarik Iziraren, Permanent Mission of Morocco, stressed the need for creating effective institutional frameworks linked with climate and robust management schemes in order to sustainably use available water resources. He noted that Morocco has a high-level water council that serves as a forum for consultation on water policies for all national actors. Barlybay Sadyko, Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan, underscored that problems of water scarcity can be solved only through partnerships with neighbors and the international community.

In the ensuing discussion, participants raised issues related to the feminization of agriculture, the tension between big businesses and small-scale farmers, and water protection.

26/01/2017 online at: <http://sdg.iisd.org/news/fao-presents-nena-water-scarcity-initiative/>

Indus waters that flow into Pakistan as waste will be brought to Punjab: Modi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday launched a scathing attack on the Congress, accusing it of following political opportunism to further its gains. The party was a “thing of the past” which the people of Punjab must not trust, he said.

The Congress is a “sinking ship” and people should not board it as it would not help them reach anywhere, he said at an election rally here.

Mr. Modi referred to the politically sensitive issue of the Sutlej Yamuna Canal, saying Punjab had the right to use water for irrigation. Waters from the Indus river that flow into Pakistan as waste would be brought to Punjab.

(Haryana and Punjab are locked in a bitter legal and emotional battle over the issue for the past several years).

With Rahul Gandhi raking up the issue of drug menace in the State at a rally in Majitha, Mr. Modi hit back at him, saying, “Some people are taking politics to a new low by tarnishing the image of the youth of Punjab.” The pride of Punjabis was tarnished by such statements and the Assembly polls in the State were the best way to reply to such remarks.

"The Congress is like water and changes its shape to suit its political needs. It is a strange party. It tied up with the Left in West Bengal to survive in that State. Whatever they [Left] gave [as seats], it accepted...In Uttar Pradesh, it attacked the Samajwadi Party in its yatra. Then it went for a pact...It saw an opportunity after a feud in the SP...," Modi said.

Dubbing "political opportunism" as the "forte" of the Congress, he said the country was witnessing the results of "politics of destruction" the country had seen in the last 70 years. "Now, we have started politics of development."

Referring to demonetization, he claimed that he had been facing "atrocities" for the past three months. "Modi hun. Zulm ke samne jhukta nahin [I am Modi. I do not bow before atrocities]," he said.

"My drive against corruption is an apolitical affair aimed at ridding the country of black money. But people who have amassed illegal wealth in the past 70 years are worried and are attacking me as they are still unable to digest the decision," he said.

27/01/2017 online at: <http://www.thehindu.com/elections/punjab-2017/Indus-waters-that-flow-into-Pakistan-as-waste-will-be-brought-to-Punjab-Modi/article17103627.ece>

WB to help Pakistan, India resolve dispute over Indus Water Treaty

World Bank (WB) Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Kristalina Georgieva said on Sunday that she held constructive discussions with the Pakistani leadership on the Indus Waters Treaty.

During her three-day visit, Georgieva called on Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, met with his economic team led by Federal Minister for Finance and the Federal Minister of Water and Power.

In a statement issued at the end of her visit to Pakistan, the WB CEO said the discussions helped her fully understand all perspectives on the Indus Water Treaty.

She said the WB would also help Pakistan and India in finding out a solution to the dispute with respect to the treaty.

The WB chief further said that during her meetings with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, the two sides agreed for speedy implementation of structural reforms to spur private investments.

She also met the leadership of Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and learnt about the reforms, efforts and development projects at provincial level

This was Georgieva's first visit to any country after assuming her new role on January 2. She plans to visit India in the next week.

India, Pakistan and the World Bank are signatories to the Indus Water Treaty, and are in discussions now on how to resolve the disagreement the two countries have over New Delhi's construction of two hydroelectric power plants.

Maintaining its neutral role as a signatory to the treaty, the WB, had in December last year, announced break in the processes initiated by India and Pakistan separately to consider alternate ways to resolve their disagreements.

30/01/2017 online at: <http://nation.com.pk/business/30-Jan-2017/wb-to-help-pakistan-india-resolve-dispute-over-indus-water-treaty>