

Beijing won't see Yangtze water for 5 more years

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By Han Manman

A plan to channel water into Beijing via the South-to-North Water Diversion Project has been postponed five years. The delay puts unprecedented pressure on the capital's water resources, which have seen falling groundwater levels for years, Beijing water authorities said early this week. The South-to-North Water Diversion Project would divert 1 billion cubic meters of the Yangtze River into Beijing next year, which would somewhat relieve Beijing's water shortage, Cheng Jing, director of the Beijing Water Authority, said. The reason for the delay is thought to be related to the redistribution of water and relocation of residents along the 1,400-kilometer channel that would link Hubei province with Beijing, Tianjin and neighboring provinces.

The capital has seen nine years of drought, leaving its water reserves in very short supply. Limited water resources impose restraints on new economic development. Cheng said establishing a rigorous water resource management system is the only way to solve the capital's water shortage.

The city will also raise water prices this year. Chen said the government is expected to draw up price hike plans within the next two months.

"The current prices are not sustainable for a city with a scarcity of water, said professor Wang Dangxian, a researcher with the China Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research.

"Raising the water price in Beijing is practical," said Wang, who said water costs Beijing residents one-fifth as much as it does residents of the world's other major cities. Cheng said the government will urge 40 heavy-polluting enterprises with high water and energy consumption to leave Beijing so the city can develop water-conserving high-end industries.

He said Beijing will promote the use of non-conventional water sources. Beijing will reclaim water from miscellaneous consumption by the municipal government, construction site dust, environmental and industrial fields. The water used for areas such as golf courses, suburb parks, large-scale green lands and irrigation will be replaced by reclaimed water.

According to figures from the Ministry of Water Resources, Beijing's usable water supplies are around 300 cubic meters per capita, a third of the national rate. The situation prompted the central government to launch the North-South Water Diversion project, an

ambitious 500-billion-yuan project aimed at diverting water from the Yangtze River and its tributaries.