

Beijing 'may collapse' over water crisis

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Beijing's water crisis is so critical that the city is facing economic collapse and the need to resettle part of its population in coming decades, a leading development policy group says.

Experts predict the Chinese capital could run out of water in five to 10 years, according to Grainne Ryder, policy director at Probe International.

Beijing would potentially have to start shutting down industry, she said, as the city would be incapable of supporting current levels of infrastructure or population.

"I would imagine it would be a phased shut-down of its economy, an economic collapse," she said.

Speaking at the launch of a report on Beijing's water crisis just six weeks before the "Green Olympics" in August, Ryder said authorities had already discussed moving people out of the capital to other cities.

This scenario, while extreme, highlights Beijing's current water crisis.

According to the report by Canada-based Probe, called "Beijing's Water Crisis: 1949-2008 Olympics," Beijing's 200 or so rivers and streams are drying up, and the city's reservoirs are almost empty.

More than two thirds of the city's water supply now comes from groundwater, and Beijing is extracting water originally intended for use in emergencies, such as war, from 1,000 metres or more underground.

At the same time, water demand is rising, and the Games - for which Beijing has developed man-made lakes, musical fountains and new parks - will consume around 200 million cubic metres of water, the report said.

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