

Beijing says water a "severe test" it can pass

BEIJING (Reuters) - China's capital has been "severely tested" in ensuring there will be enough safe water for the 2008 Olympics but is sure that recycling run-off and tapping additional sources will avoid shortages, a city official said.

Beijing lies in the country's arid north, a region where urban growth, industrialization and pollution have strained supplies, forcing the city of 16 million to draw increasingly on declining underground sources.

With the Olympic Games opening in August set to lift demand, Beijing has turned to neighboring Hebei province, enduring a long drought, to supply 300 million cubic meters of "back-up" water through a network of canals.

Northern China has had very little rain or snow throughout the winter, adding to worries. But Zhang Shouquan, a deputy chief of the Beijing water bureau, said athletes and visitors could expect clean, full supplies for pools, taps and a big scenic lake.

"How to ensure water supplies for the Olympic Games period has been a severe test for us," Zhang told the Chinese-language Sohu news Web site (news.sohu.com) in an on-line interview.

"Now our water quality is fine and we can absolutely guarantee supplies for the competitions ... We can certainly ensure the water-quality security for athletes."

Zhang gave apparently contradictory numbers for supply and demand, saying that Beijing planned to supply 3 billion cubic meters of water in 2008, which he said was "much higher than the past year." But he also said that in recent years Beijing had consumed up to 3.5 billion cubic meters of water a year.

"The problem we have now is that, as well as shortfalls in water sources, there is also severe pollution of the aquatic environment," Zhang said. "Our task in cleaning up water is extremely arduous."

But a combination of increased water-saving and recycling, the planned extra supplies from Hebei and tapping underground sources would ensure that the spike in demand could be met, Zhang said.

BEIJING (Reuters) - China's capital has been "severely tested" in ensuring there will be enough safe water for the 2008 Olympics but is sure that recycling run-off and tapping additional sources will avoid shortages, a city official said.

Beijing lies in the country's arid north, a region where urban growth, industrialization and pollution have strained supplies, forcing the city of 16 million to draw increasingly on declining underground sources.

With the Olympic Games opening in August set to lift demand, Beijing has turned to neighboring Hebei province, enduring a long drought, to supply 300 million cubic meters of "back-up" water through a network of canals.

Northern China has had very little rain or snow throughout the winter, adding to worries. But Zhang Shouquan, a deputy chief of the Beijing water bureau, said athletes and visitors could expect clean, full supplies for pools, taps and a big scenic lake.

"How to ensure water supplies for the Olympic Games period has been a severe test for us," Zhang told the Chinese-language Sohu news Web site (news.sohu.com) in an on-line interview.

"Now our water quality is fine and we can absolutely guarantee supplies for the competitions ... We can certainly ensure the water-quality security for athletes."

Zhang gave apparently contradictory numbers for supply and demand, saying that Beijing planned to supply 3 billion cubic meters of water in 2008, which he said was "much higher than the past year." But he also said that in recent years Beijing had consumed up to 3.5 billion cubic meters of water a year.

"The problem we have now is that, as well as shortfalls in water sources, there is also severe pollution of the aquatic environment," Zhang said. "Our task in cleaning up water is extremely arduous."

But a combination of increased water-saving and recycling, the planned extra supplies from Hebei and tapping underground sources would ensure that the spike in demand could be met, Zhang said.