

Qatar facing massive ground water depletion

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DOHA Qatar is facing a serious depletion of its underground water table, and it must ban the digging of wells to resolve the crisis, say top officials of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

The country's consumption of ground water is much higher than its recharge from rain. The water table has been falling for nearly four decades now. Depletion since 1971 stands at a shocking -2340 million cubic metres. In 2004-05 alone, the year for which the latest figures are available, the table depleted by about -160 million cubic metres, an official of the Department of Agriculture and Water Research told *Qatar Tribune*. The ministry was holding a workshop at the Texas A&M University here on Tuesday.

"We are in very bad shape. The department is now formulating a 'groundwater management and development strategy' to tackle the crisis," said Kamel Mostafa Amer, a water resources expert at the department.

High consumption is not the only problem. Amer said the



An expert speaks during a workshop at the Texas A&M University in Doha on Tuesday.

continuous depletion of ground water had resulted in an intrusion from sea water as well, deteriorating the quality of ground water.

"We understand the magnitude of the problem. We have been working on the issue. Besides recommending a ban on the digging of wells, we will be suggesting the adoption of various means to stop the percolation and mixing of sea water with underground water," said Sheikh Dr Faleh bin Nasser al Thani, the director-general of

the department.

"We must give special priority to protect and maintain our only natural potable water source - which is ground water. This workshop is the first in a series planned to discuss and find solutions to several critical issues in the agricultural sector," he added.

Amer said: "Popularising modern irrigation techniques, encouraging farm owners to intensify use of intensive farming practices like greenhouses and running a water awareness campaign will also help."

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