



KATHMANDU KITCHEN. A zookeeper mixes vegetables to feed animals at the animal kitchen inside Nepal's Central Zoo in Lalitpur, Nepal. The only zoo in Nepal is home to more than 1,100 animals and 114 species, including Bengal tigers, snow leopards, red pandas, one-horned rhinos, and Asian elephants. In the bottom photo, a zookeeper feeds a Sarus Crane at the Central Zoo. (AP Photos/Niranjana Shrestha)

A 41-year-old pelican and other animals wait for their food at Nepal's only zoo

By Niranjana Shrestha
The Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal — At the stroke of 10 every morning at the only zoo in Nepal, a 41-year-old pelican arrives at the entrance of the animal kitchen, waiting patiently for program officer Ganesh Koirala to arrive. The pelican knows that with Koirala will come breakfast — a two-pound fish.

Inside the busy kitchen, zookeepers wash vegetables and cut meat and fish for the zoo's residents.

The Central Zoo in Kathmandu is home to more than 1,100 animals and 114 species, including Bengal tigers, snow leopards, red pandas, one-horned rhinos, and Asian elephants.

More than 15 of 38 local endangered species reside in the zoo, which welcomes around 1 million visitors per year.

The zoo originated in 1932 as the private collection of a ruler, but now is managed by a government trust and is open to the public.

"When I am on my day off, I cannot stop thinking whether the animals got their food on time. They are like small babies," said Rojina Shrestha, a zookeeper for over a decade.

Some of the animals were brought to the zoo with injuries, were orphaned, or were causing a nuisance to communities, Koirala said. But space is limited to accommodate them in the 15-acre site.

Authorities hope to move the zoo to a different location outside the capital, but government resources are limited.

India's Bengaluru is fast running out of water, and a long, scorching summer still looms

By Sibi Arasu
The Associated Press

BENGALURU, India — Bhavani Mani Muthuvel and her family of nine have around five 5-gallon buckets worth of water for the week for cooking, cleaning, and household chores.

"From taking showers to using toilets and washing clothes, we are taking turns to do everything," she said. It's the only water they can afford.

A resident of Ambedkar Nagar, a low-income settlement in the shadows of the lavish headquarters of multiple global software companies in Bengaluru's Whitefield neighborhood, Muthuvel is normally reliant on piped water, sourced from groundwater. But it's drying up. She said it's the worst water crisis she has experienced in her 40 years in the neighborhood.

Bengaluru in southern India witnessed an unusually hot February and March, and in the last few years, it has received little rainfall in part due to human-caused climate change. Water levels are running desperately low, particularly in poorer areas, resulting in sky-high costs for water and a quickly dwindling supply.

City and state government authorities are trying to get the situation under control with emergency measures such as nationalizing water tankers and putting a cap on water costs. But water experts and many residents fear the worst is still to come in April and May when the summer sun is at its strongest.

The crisis was a long time coming, said Shashank Palur, a Bengaluru-based hydrologist with the think tank Water, Environment, Land, and Livelihood Labs.

"Bengaluru is one of the fastest growing cities in the world and the infrastructure for fresh water supply is not able to keep up with a growing population," he said.

Groundwater, relied on by more than a third of the city's 13 million residents, is fast running out. City authorities say 6,900 of the 13,900 borewells drilled in the city have run dry despite some being drilled to depths of 1,500 feet. Those reliant on groundwater, like Muthuvel, now have to depend on water tankers that pump from nearby villages.

Palur said El Niño, a natural phenomenon that affects weather patterns worldwide, along with the city receiving less rainfall in recent years, mean "recharge of groundwater levels did not happen as expected." A new piped water supply from the Cauvery River about 60 miles from the city has also not been completed, adding to the crisis, he said.

Another concern is that paved surfaces cover nearly 90% of the city, preventing rainwater from seeping down and being stored in the ground, said T.V. Ramachandra, research scientist at the Centre for Ecological Sciences at Bengaluru-based Indian Institute of Science. The city lost nearly 70% of its green cover in the last 50 years, he said.

Ramachandra compared the city's water shortage to the "day zero" water crisis in Cape Town, South Africa, 2018, when that city came dangerously close to turning off most taps because of a drought.

The Indian government estimated in 2018 that more than 40% of Bengaluru residents won't have access to drinking water by the end of the decade. Only those that receive piped water from rivers outside Bengaluru are still getting regular supply.

"Right now, everyone is drilling borewells in buffer zones of lakes. That is not the solution," Ramachandra said.



PARCHED PLACE. Residents, top photo, of Ambedkar Nagar — a low-income settlement in the shadows of global software companies in the Whitefield neighborhood — collect potable water from a private tanker in Bengaluru, India. Water levels are running desperately low, particularly in poorer regions, resulting in sky-high costs for water and a quickly dwindling supply. In the bottom photo, potable water is loaded into a private water tanker from a temporary pond created to store groundwater to later be sold at high costs to offices and apartments in Bengaluru. (AP Photo/Aijaz Rahi)

He said the city should instead focus on replenishing the more than 200 lakes spread across the city, stop new construction on lake areas, encourage rainwater harvesting, and increase green cover across the city.

"Only if we do this will we solve the city's water problem," he said.

Palur added that identifying other sources and using them smartly, for example by reusing treated wastewater in the city "so that the demand for fresh water reduces," could also help.

Until then, some residents are taking serious measures. S. Prasad, who lives with his wife and two children in a housing society made up of 230 apartments, said they have begun water rationing.

"Since last week we've closed the water supply to houses for eight hours every day, starting at 10:00am. Residents have to either store water in containers or do everything they need to in the allotted time. We are also planning on installing water meters soon," he said.

Prasad said their housing society, like many others in Bengaluru, is willing to pay high costs for water, but even then it's hard to find suppliers.

"This water shortage is not only impacting our work but also our daily life," Prasad said. "If it becomes even more dire, we'll have no choice but to leave Bengaluru temporarily."

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Chinese city officials issue rare apology after authorities harass journalists on live TV

By Simina Mistreanu
The Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan — City officials in eastern China apologized to local journalists after authorities were shown pushing them and trying to obstruct reporting from the site of a deadly explosion, in a rare acknowledgment of state aggression against journalists.

The city of Sanhe, near Beijing, issued a public apology after authorities were shown harassing reporters from state broadcaster CCTV during a live broadcast near the site of a suspected gas leak explosion that killed seven and injured 27.

Harassment of journalists — including foreign reporters — is common in China but almost never acknowledged by the state.

A statement on the city's official website expressed "deep regret" over the treatment of the CCTV reporters and other media workers. It said authorities were trying to remove the journalists from the site be-

cause of concern about a potential gas leak.

"The poor communication skills of our frontline staff and their rough and simplistic methods caused misunderstandings among journalists and doubts among the public, resulting in a negative social impact," it said.

The harassment, shown live during the midday newscast, was a rare off-script moment for China's tightly controlled state media. Beijing regards media as propaganda tools and regularly issues directives about topics that are off-limits for coverage. The All-China Journalists Association put out a statement defending the journalists' right to report from disaster sites. It fell short of explicitly condemning the Sanhe authorities' actions.

Foreign journalists are often harassed, manhandled, or followed by plainclothes police while reporting in China, and their sources may be threatened, interrogated, or detained.

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