

# Drought hits Bishkek, where taps are running dry

June 12 2023, by Arseny Mamashev

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In southern Bishkek, residents have come to rely on plastic bottles of water.

For the past month, Bishkek resident Kanychai Bakirova has lived with her family of 11, including young children, in a home with only a trickle of water running from the tap.

At the laundrette where she works, she is unable to serve customers who come in with piles of dirty clothes.

"I'm a laundress but I can only run three washing machines," 59-year-old Bakirova told AFP, waiting her turn to collect [water](#) at a distribution point as others took the opportunity to wash their faces.

In the south of the Kyrgyz capital, where the [water shortage](#) is acute, such scenes are increasingly common.

Drought—once restricted to the country's villages—is now drying city-dwellers' taps.

With Soviet-era water infrastructure and few resources, the Bishkek authorities have struggled to keep the water running.

In the southern districts of the city, residents have come to rely on plastic bottles of water distributed by the city as temperatures near 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit).

"I haven't had running water for more than three weeks," said Imach Omorov, 61.

"I was able to get 150 liters (33 gallons). Hopefully that's enough for the next three weeks."

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The authorities have introduced restrictions to manage water supply and demand.

In some districts of Bishkek, water was cut off at night.

Swimming pools and car washes were closed. Night-time watering was banned.

But residents have struggled to cope.

When Omorov's neighbor died, "it was complicated to wash the body", he said.

## **A chronic problem**

Like other city-dwellers, Omorov took part in a protest against the water shortage this week, where demonstrators blocked one of the main avenues south of the capital.

His frustrations are shared across Central Asia, where [water shortages](#) are a chronic problem.

According to the World Bank, almost a third of the region's approximately 75 million inhabitants do not have access to water.

In Kyrgyzstan, where one million now lack access to water, [consumption levels](#) are rising.

"Daily water consumption per person was around 170 liters.



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The country's water infrastructure dates back to the Soviet era.

"But it has tripled—almost quadrupled—with the rise in temperatures since May," said Kadyrbek Otorov, chief engineer at the organization in charge of water distribution in Bishkek.

One cause of the drought this year is the steep drop in the water table.

That, in turn, is caused by the melting of glaciers due to climate change.

"The level of groundwater, which provides water to 40-45 percent of the city, especially the south, has dropped by 15 to 20 meters (50-65 feet) compared to last year," said Otorov.

Bishkek has not seen such water scarcity "for eight to 10 years".

The country's water infrastructure dates back to the Soviet era.

While the authorities have allocated funds to update the water infrastructure, it has suffered from under-investment.

For now, scientist Otorov warns "there isn't an infinite supply of drinking water". Water must be used with "great care".

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