

Conservation of water is a top priority

■ Country's rapid development having major impact on water supplies ■ Minister of Environment speaks out

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Underground water supplies in the UAE cannot meet the increasing demand caused by rapid urbanisation, Dr Mohammed Saeed Al Ghandi, the Minister of Environment, has warned.

The country's fast development has improved health, housing and other services – but it has had a major impact on the country's water supplies.

Dr Al Ghandi said the government was making the issue a top priority following directives from the President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan and His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai.

Dr Al Ghandi said his ministry has made serious efforts to preserve underground water and to find new sources.

These included creating artificial rain, building massive dams, using advanced irrigation methods and encouraging the use of polythene enclosures for farming.

The government had issued laws to control the pumping

LEAKING PIPES QUESTIONED

Water chiefs have dismissed claims that 40 per cent of supplies in the northern emirates are being lost through leaking pipes.

The claim was made by an industry source who said: "If you are worried about one thing regarding the UAE's water, transmission losses would be the biggest concern."

"The problem is in older pipes made of material that has a short life-span. Some estimates I've heard is that line losses are as high as 40 per cent in some of the northern emirates because of the old infrastructure. That's a lot of water to lose."

But the Federal Electricity and Water Authority, which is responsible for water supplies in the northern emirates, denied the allegation.

"Previously, yes, but we have replaced lots of pipes with new ones," said director Mohammad Saleh.

"We inspect all our lines for any deterioration and have teams set up for this."

"They work area by area with specialised equipment to detect leaks. We have preserved a huge amount of water by doing this."

and use of water in a bid to decrease its usage.

Production at water desalination and electricity generation plants had increased greatly over the past few years, and the government has encouraged the private sector to build and operate more plants.

Dr Al Ghandi was addressing the two-day International Water Management Conference at Dubai's Hyatt Regency Hotel.

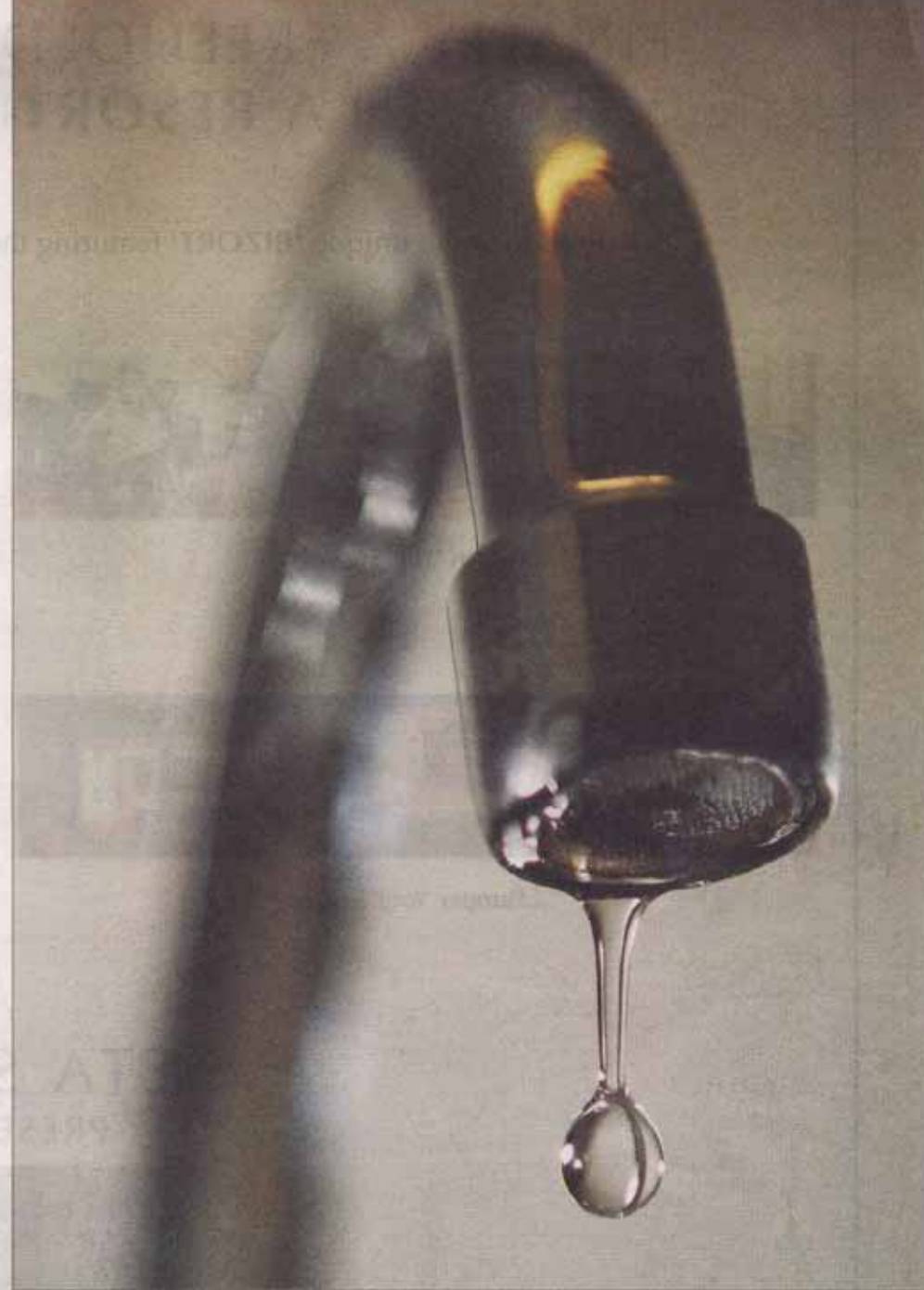
A number of UAE academic experts, researchers and geol-

ogists have said the rate of water consumption has risen to a reserve-threatening level.

Researcher Muna Khalil Al Hammadi of Emirates University's geology department said the average per capita consumption of water in the UAE had reached 650 litres a day, citing a recent Abu Dhabi Authority study.

In Abu Dhabi alone the average per capita daily consumption is 1,200 cubic metres, one of the highest in the world.

In Dubai, meanwhile, the



■ Abu Dhabi uses 1,200 cubic metres of water each day, while Dubai uses 1,030 cubic metres each day GETTY IMAGES

average per capita consumption in 2004 was 1,030 cubic metres a day compared to 910 cubic metres in 2000.

Al Hammadi said Abu

Dhabi Authority studies have shown that 3.5 billion cubic metres of underground water is withdrawn annually.

Meanwhile, the average

production of desalination plants reached 800 million cubic metres and that of some springs stood at 120 million cubic metres.