

JEDDAH - Several districts in northern Jeddah districts have now joined the list of areas affected by acute water crisis. The districts feeling the pinch now are Al-Jamia, Al-Hindawiah, Al-Sabeel, Al-Bukhariah, Al-Baghdadiyah, Al-Safa, Mushrefah, Al-Makarona, Al-Ruwais, Al-Sharafia, Al-Rehab, Guwaizah, Al-Naseem and Al-Haramain.

Several citizens who spoke to Okaz have called for an urgent rescheduling of water distribution. They also urged the water authorities to repair the leakages in water networks.

With temperatures soaring in the city as elsewhere in the Kingdom, many residents fear the crisis will aggravate in the coming weeks. The emergence of black market for "Suqya" prepaid water cards and at water distribution centers has now become a recurring problem, several residents pointed out. Queues at water distribution centers will get longer in the coming weeks if authorities do not take immediate remedial measures, they said.

Hasan Ajjaj, a Saudi, said districts like Guwaizah have been suffering from water crisis for the past three months. Mohammed Al-Omairi, another Saudi, said residents of his district are forced to queue up at water distribution centers after distribution schedule was changed earlier this month.

Mohammed Al-Malki of Al-Safa District said the plight of Jeddah residents is multiplying. "We have read about signing of a contract with a company to operate water project in Jeddah. But where is it" he asked.

Ibrahim Al-Khairi, a resident of Al-Nuzha District, demanded a speedy distribution of water from the seawater desalination barge that has become operational recently. "The state has provided desalination plants and a barge, but where does the fault lie?"

The water distribution points are still overcrowded despite efforts of the Water Department in Jeddah to facilitate the distribution of water tankers.

Abdullah Taher said he got a serial number but when he went out to get a water tanker, he was surprised that there were none left. He lamented that he had to wait for long hours under the scorching sun. He said he had to pay SR1,800 to get a connection to the water network in addition to SR2,600 for a water meter but all these were fruitless, as he did not get any water till now.

Khalid Abdullah said that he was forced to remain absent from work to fetch a water tanker. He said the Water Department can allocate a telephone service for ordering water tankers instead of citizens taking the trouble to come personally and pay in advance. He said this could be a solution for the present period until the crisis is overcome.

Amm Ali, an old man living in Guwaizah District, appeared to be exhausted due to the long wait under the hot sun.

Several other citizens expressed discontent about the "Suqya" prepaid water cards. They said the customer service telephone number allocated for this is either busy or there is no reply.

They also said it is difficult to purchase these "Suqya" cards. Mohsin Al-Attas, Muhammad Al-Jabr, Salim Al-Johani, Adel Al-Fayez and Ibrahim Ghanim said they used to deal with such cards before and they were good to some extent, but with the overcrowding and crisis, the situation has worsened.

For its part, the Water Department said that it is striving to solve this crisis and reschedule water distribution to the districts as of Saturday.