

Zarqa River to undergo restoration process

AMMAN (JT) — Prime Minister Marouf Bakhit went on an inspection tour of the Zarqa River on Monday, which included the Ain Ghazal Wastewater Treatment Plant and Ruseifa, ending at Zawahreh Bridge in Zarqa city.

Environment Minister Khalid Irani, Minister of Water and Irrigation Thamer Alem and Health Minister Saad Kharabsheh accompanied the premier.

Stressing the need to solve the Zarqa River pollution problem, Bakhit instructed the Ministry of Water and Irrigation, the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) and Ruseifa Municipality to immediately start the restoration process in order to rid the river of its stagnant water.

He also emphasised the importance of intensifying the monitoring of violations to sewage network systems, like illegal connections.

In remarks to the press on Sunday, Alem said his ministry had dealt with 167 violations, where citizens connected their own sewage networks to the rainwater drainage system linked to the river.

Alem said the 10 per cent of wastewater in the river is the direct result of the violations.

The water minister told reporters that a sand dam near Ain Ghazal, which collapsed recently because of heavy rains, would be rebuilt to divert the water in the treatment plant to the river, which finally pours into King Talal Dam.

The JD45 million restoration process will last for 10 years, the minister said, adding it would include tourism and socio-economic projects.

Meanwhile, Irani briefed Bakhit on a technical assistance agreement the Ministry of Environment signed with the IUCN (World Conservation Union) WESCANA Re-

gional Office to develop the Zarqa River Restoration Project Document, which will consider a holistic approach to the river's restoration activities.

The agreement is part of the IUCN WESCANA Regional DGCS Water Project, which will provide technical assistance to the ministry in implementing a systemic approach in the field of Integrated Water Resources Management.

The premier called for a meeting of all concerned parties next week to discuss an action strategy to deal with the chronic pollution problem and any future hurdles.

Environmentalists and government agency experts convened in August to thrash out the multifaceted plan to address the chronically polluted river.

The meeting was one of a series of such discussions held to tackle pollution in the river, which is seen as turning into a sewage canal.

Last July, the ministry carried out a technical survey to identify the sources of pollution affecting the river and the resulting environmental problems.

The Zarqa Governorate, which has a reputation for being one of the country's environmental hotspots, is home to 52 per cent of the Kingdom's industrial plants.

The river suffers from many sources of pollution, much of which emanates from these nearby factories.

According to the Water Data Bank Project, several factors have led to the current situation.

Extraction from aquifers in the upper Amman-Zarqa groundwater basin has reduced the natural base flow of the river, which is also extensively used for municipal water supply.

The flow characteristics have been further affected by



Petra photos

Prime Minister Marouf Bakhit speaks to officials during an inspection tour of the Zarqa River on Monday

the discharge of treated domestic and industrial wastewater that comprises nearly all of the summer flow, substantially degrading the water quality, experts said.

The pollution levels have got so severe that over recent years that nearby residents have consistently complained about the stench from the river, particularly in the summer months.

Parliamentarians, various ministries, GAM, the Jordan Armed Forces, the Public Security Department, the Civil Defense Department and civil society organisations are involved in efforts to address the problem.

