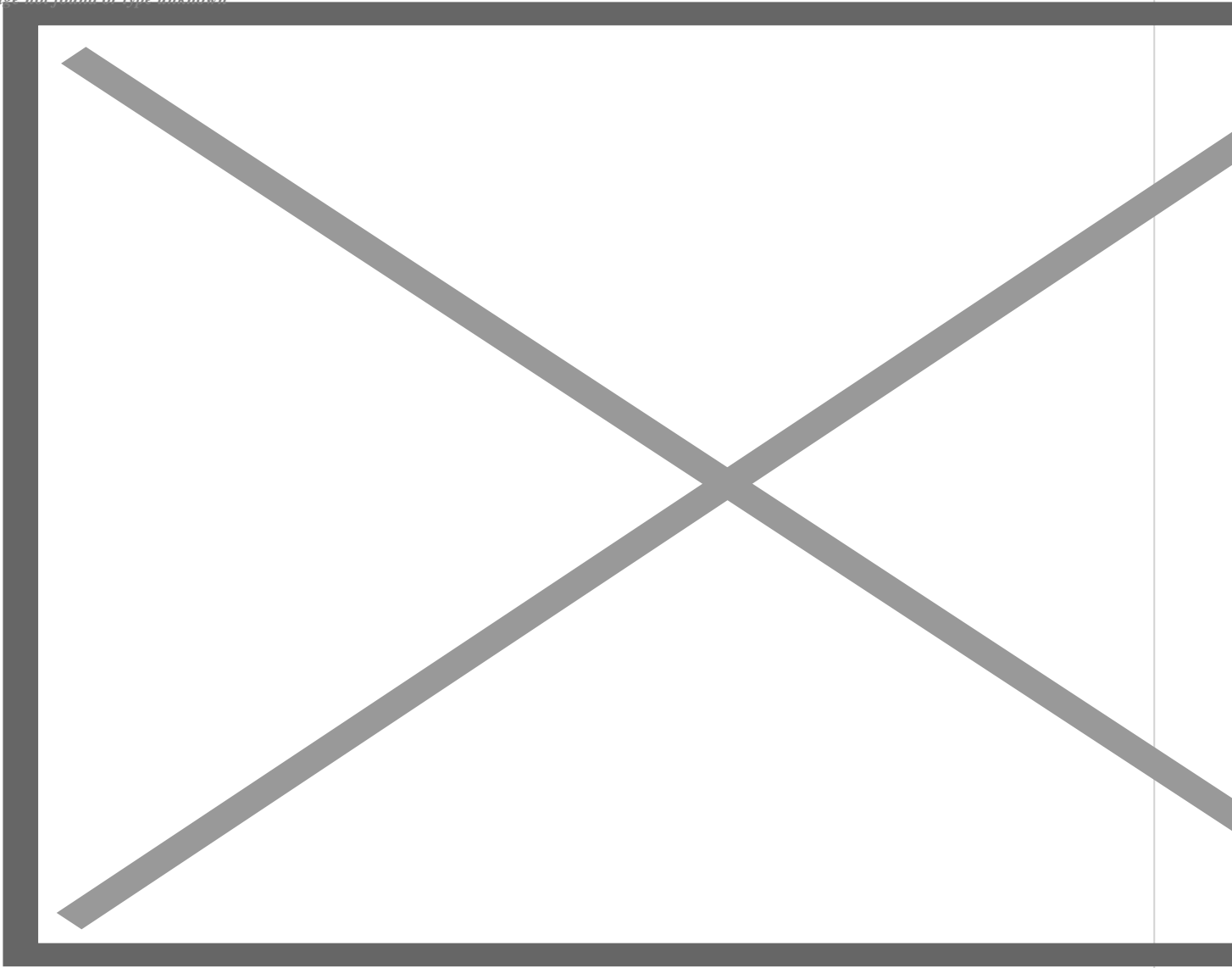


Drought in Mexico reaches critical levels as lakes dry up

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Cracked earth lines the banks of the Villa Victoria Dam, the main water supply for Mexico City residents, located on the outskirts of Toluca, Mexico [Fernando Llano/AP Photo]

Mexico City, April 23 (RHC)-- Drought conditions now cover 85 percent of Mexico, and residents of the nation's central region said that lakes and reservoirs are simply drying up, including the country's second-largest body of freshwater.

The mayor of Mexico City said the drought was the worst in 30 years, and the problem can be seen at the reservoirs that store water from other states to supply the capital. Mexico City Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum said that as the drought worsened, more people have tended to water their lawns and gardens, which exacerbates the problem.

The capital's nine million inhabitants rely on reservoirs like Villa Victoria and two others -- which together are at about 44 percent capacity -- for a quarter of their water. Most of the rest comes from wells within city limits. But the city's own water table is dropping and leaky pipes waste much of what is brought into the city.

Further to the west, in Michoacan state, the country is at risk of losing its second-largest lake, Lake Cuitzeo, where about 70 percent of the lake bed is now dry. The main culprit is drought, but residents say that roads built across the shallow lake and diversion of water for human use have also played a role.

Michoacan Governor Silvano Aureoles said so much of the lake has dried up that shoreline communities now suffer dust storms. He said communities might have to start planting vegetation on the lake bed to prevent them.

In a petition to the government, residents of communities around the lake said only six of 19 fish species once present in Cuitzeo now remain. They said the dust storms had caused tens of thousands of respiratory and intestinal infections among local residents.

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