Uruguay: A meager drop of water

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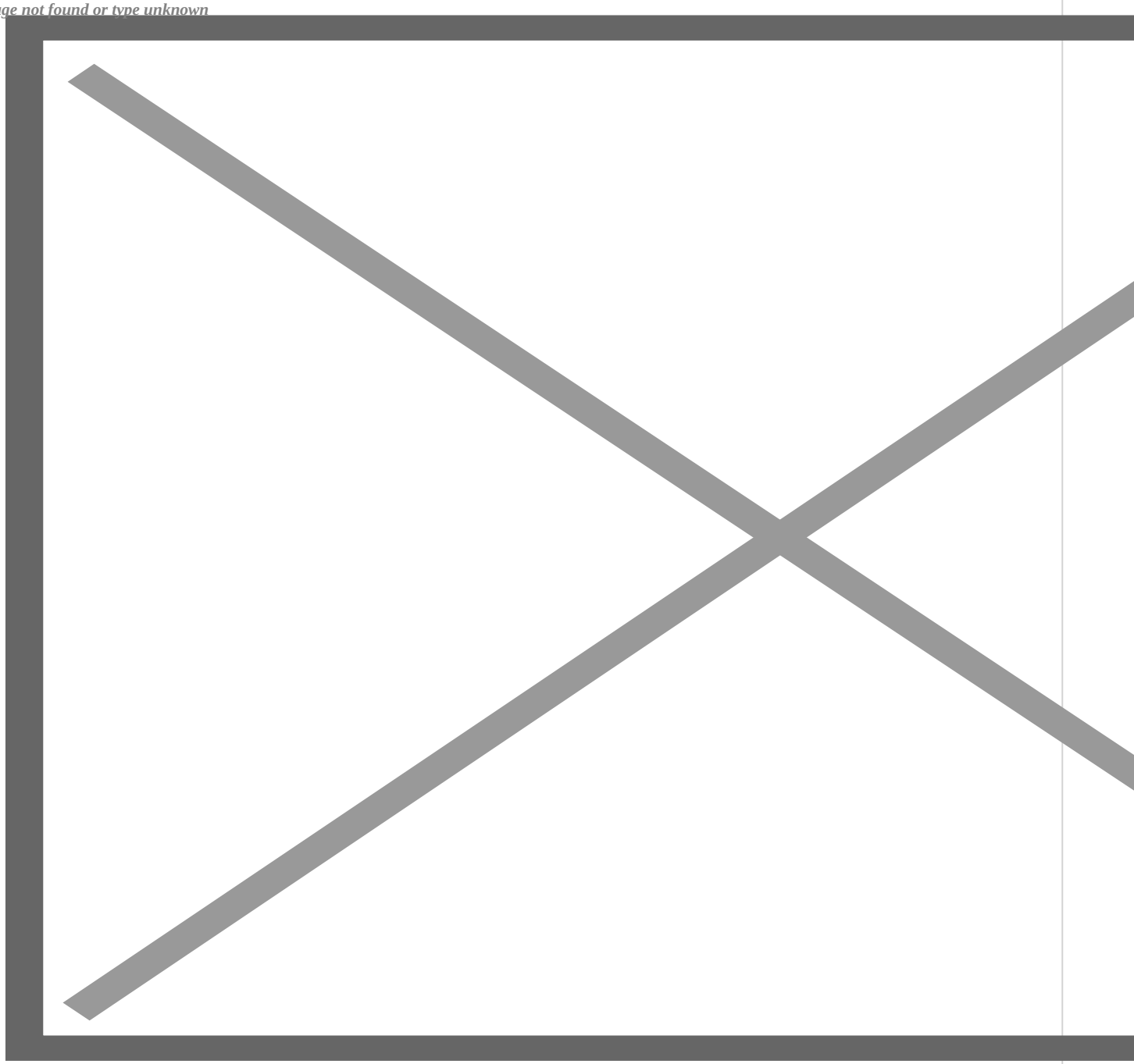

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By Roberto Morejon

Uruguayans breathed a sigh of relief at the recent downpour, but for many it was still insufficient to alleviate the acute drought, the worst in 70 years, causing a water crisis, the worst in local history.

The meager river rainfall slightly benefited the Paso Severino reservoir, vital for Montevideo, the capital city, affected as well as the rest of the country.

The reservoir, the largest in Uruguay, has dropped dangerously to less than 2.4 percent of its capacity and inspires logical fear.

The serious situation gained prominence in recent months when the canals through which the vital liquid is carried reduced in size, and salty water began to flow out of the taps of customers in their homes.

For many Uruguayans, the current difficulties are not only linked to the absence of storms, but also to the lack of official policies aimed at mitigating the impacts of dry periods.

In the opinion of the directors of the Administración Nacional de las Obras Sanitarias del Estado, the current water crisis could have been avoided if the government of the neoliberal President Luis Lacalle Pou had undertaken infrastructure works.

The aforementioned public company had to cut US$ 200 million in investments, in addition to the interruption of the plan of the former president of the country, Tabaré Vázquez, to build a reservoir in an important stream.

Let us remember that, as is common in the philosophy of this type of right-wing governments, during his term of office, financing to the State is reduced.

Faced with the agonizing availability of this essential natural resource, the only thing left to do is to resort to bottled water sold in stores, but vulnerable sectors, afflicted by low salaries, claim to have difficulties in acquiring it.

In addition to all the above, there is what opposition sources have denounced as a lack of transparency and communication by Lacalle Pou's government when referring to the water situation.

Fortunately, Uruguayans are counting on the recent downpours that will allow a moderate flow of fresh water in the Santa Lucia River basin.

But normal conditions would only return to normal in Uruguay, according to experts, if August and September see rainfall averaging at least 100 millimeters in each of those months.

In the meantime, the government is content to recommend a reduction in household water consumption.

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