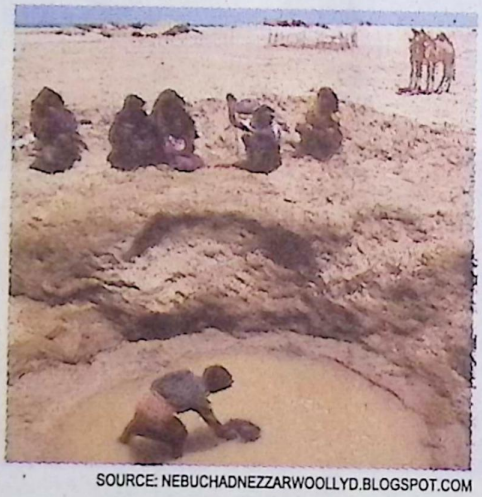
Heading towards Water-Wars?

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"You don't miss water until your well runs dry"
--An age old country proverb

It's not just for poetic purposes that water is compared to life itself. This tasteless, odourless and transparent liquid is the key reason why life has thrived here on Earth in the first place and still continues to survive. Even though it is believed that water may exist in abundance in planets in other galaxies too, mainly due to its components, hydrogen and oxygen, which are among the most abundant elements in the universe, this planet is privileged to have 71% of her surface covered with water. But unfortunately saltwater oceans hold 97% of surface water and glaciers and polar ice caps account for 2.4% while only 0.6% of surface water is stored in rivers, lakes and ponds which have been the key sources of human survival for generations. But it seems that with time the equal access to this supply of "safe" water for the global population is shrinking. As of this March 22, 2009, which was the World Water Day, there are about 1 billion people of the world who routinely drink unhealthy water and sadly the number is rising.



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Almost half of the world's total population that is 2.5 out of 6 billion do not have the access to the amount of water that is required to have proper sanitation. According to WHO around 5 million people die every year due to drinking polluted water and living under unsanitary conditions; amongst them 1.4 million are children. In 2003, UNESCO's World Water Development Report (WWDR) predicted that in the next 20 years the quantity of water available to everyone is likely to decrease by 30% and now many experts believe that by 2025, more than half of the global population will be facing water-based vulnerability to such an extent that it already has been referred to as a 'Water Crisis' by the United Nations. But probably the worst part is the global politics that is involved in scheming on who gets access to clean water and who doesn't. According to some scientists, the world does have enough supply to meet the needs of the current population and even the 9 billion which is going to be the total global population by 2050. The problem, however, remains that access to safe water is frequently tied to income, as a result, water is constantly viewed as an economic good rather than man's universal right which is why the situation is likely to deteriorate.

These concerns of global water scarcity and the politics involved in it were addressed in the conference of World Water Forum (WWF) in Istanbul held this March and prior to that in Davos earlier this year in the annual meetings of the World Economic Forum (WEF) where experts warned that the world is drastically heading towards "water bankruptcy". This could bring dire consequences for the regional economic, environmental and political stability. With the rise of global population and increasing demand for food, naturally there has been immense pressure on the existing water supply sources to meet the ever-increasing demands whether it is for domestic, agricultural or industrial purposes. According to a UN sponsored 2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 70 of the world's main rivers which includes Ganges, Jordan, Nile, Tigris-Euphrates and Colorado are very close to their "maximum extraction levels to supply water for irrigation systems and for reservoirs". Over 260 river basins of the world are shared by two or more countries and dozens of such rivers that cross boundaries in the regions of South Asia to the Middle-East and South-Western US are considered as "regional water bubbles" where tensions over the control and distribution of water exist which, many fear could lead to severe hostility. According to The United Nations Committee on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights, access to water is considered as pre-requisite to the realisation of all other human rights. However, the whole concept of control, distribution and access to water are constantly being politicised and monopolized very methodically. Some 200