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## 'Tension over water won't lead to wars'

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NEW DELHI: Competition over controlling the planet's water resources will increase among nations in the next decade but will not lead to war, says UNDP's policy specialist Arunabha Ghosh.

Hydrologists have set 1,700 cubic metres per person as the minimum amount of water needed to grow food, support industries and maintain the environment. At present, 800 million people across the globe live below this threshold.

According to UNDP's Human Development Report 2006, by 2025, over 3 billion people would be living under water stress.

Putting to rest the theory of water wars between countries who share rivers and lakes, Ghosh told TOI, "In past 50 years, 37 stray incidents of violence have taken place between countries over water, 30 of which have been in the Middle East. However, none of them were wars. The last war fought over water was 4,000 years ago.

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Also in the last 50 years, over 200 treaties on water were negotiated between countries. India and Pakistan, despite two wars and constant geopolitical tension, have for half a century jointly managed shared watersheds through the Permanent Indus Water Commission."

He added: "We do have evidence that there will be increased tension among nations sharing water. However, globally there is enough water for everyone. Managing shared water can be a force for peace or for conflict, but it is politics that will decide the course to be taken."

Earth may be a water planet but 97% of its water is in its oceans. Most of the remainder is locked in Antarctic ice caps or deep underground, leaving less than 1% available for human use in fresh water lakes and rivers.

Planet earth's hydrological system pumps and transfers about 44,000 cubic kilometres of water to the land each year, equivalent to 6,900 cubic metres for everyone on the planet.

The problem is that some countries get a lot more than others. Almost a quarter of the world's supply of fresh water is in Lake Baikal in the sparsely populated Siberia. With 31% of global fresh water resources, Latin America has 12 times more water per person than South Asia.

Water stressed Yemen is not helped by Canada's over abundance of fresh water (90,000 cubic metre per person) and water stressed regions in China and India are not relieved by Iceland's water availability of more than 300 times the 1,700 cubic

metre threshold.

Hydrologists typically assess scarcity by looking at the population - water equation. Today, people in 43 countries live below the water stress threshold.

With average annual availability of about 1,200 cubic metres per person, the Middle East is the world's most water stressed region.

Ghosh said that two out of five people in the world live in transboundary river basins. There are 263 international water basins.

Over 40% of the world's population lives in these areas. Luckily, 90% of this population lives in countries that share water.



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