

Attend to other water woes, too

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Article

- Comment - New Sunday Times - 01/09/2005

With the tsunami tragedy still fresh in our minds, perhaps many would be curious to know how much water there is on Earth.

According to the *National Geographic* (Sept, 2002), if the Earth crust is smothered, the entire surface of the planet would be covered by 2682.24 metres of seawater.

Put it another way, if all the seawater is evaporated, the Earth would be covered with more than 12.192 metres of salt.

If so, it looks like there is enough water to go around, only that seawater is virtually not "usable".

Ironically though, when it comes to "usable" water, the amount is no more than three per cent that of the seas and oceans.

Less still is available for home, agricultural and industrial use since a vast amount is kept frozen in glaciers and ice caps.

Indeed, a shortage of fresh potable (drinkable) water is at the top of the list confronting humanity in the new millennium, and it especially affects developing countries.

The United Nations estimates that 2.7 billion people would face severe water shortages by 2025, at the prevailing rate of water consumption.

With the projected increase of the world population, the situation can only get worse as the supply of fresh water will not increase correspondingly.

In fact, it is the reverse since water used and wasted are generally not replenished. Much of this accounts for agricultural use.

The Earth's six billion people are already said to overtax its supply of accessible fresh water, with more than a billion having to contend with unclean water, and more than double this number without proper sanitary systems.

The aftermath of the recent tsunami is an illustration of how many billions of people suffer a daily shortage of potable water in different parts of the world, much as those faced by the victims of the monstrous waves.

Sadly though, these billions have never been on our radar screen although the conditions are no less tragic.

For example, more than five million people die each year from water-related diseases such as cholera and dysentery.

And a majority of them are children, a daily occurrence unnoticed by many of us even when some are just nearby. Does this mean that they should be ignored until the problem turns into a tsunami-like tragedy?

Remember, the problem can only get worse if we do not attend to it today. And when a tragedy occurs, the billions of ringgit in aid collected from all over the world will be of no use.

It would be better if the billions were spent now to save the situation, including increasing water prices as a firm reminder of what is to come if we continue to be wasteful.

Fortunately, there is already a Ministry set up to specifically to look into water issues.

The Government could also look into setting up the off-mentioned post-tragedy early warning system now.

Thus, as we share the sorrows of the tsunami victim everywhere, we must think too of the impending global disaster, ironically caused by the lack-of potable water.

This time it will not be confined to those at the seafront. The whole world is vulnerable and we must act now before it is too late.



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