

NOTE

Of Water Shortage and Climate Change

MM writes :

The world faces a bleak future over its dwindling water supplies, with pollution, climate change and rapidly growing populations raising the possibility of widespread shortages, a new report compiled by 24 agencies of the United Nations says.

The warning from the UN is based on one of the most comprehensive assessments the global body has undertaken on the state of the world's fresh water and was commissioned for use at a major international water conference being held in March in Istanbul.

"Today, water management crises are developing in most of the world," the report says, citing a single week in November of 2006 when there were local news reports of shortages in 14 countries, including parts of Canada, the United States and Australia.

While water supplies are under threat, the demand for water is increasing rapidly because of industrialization, rising living standards and changing diets.

"The result is a continuously increasing demand for finite water resources for which there are no substitutes," it says, predicting that by 2030, nearly half of the world's population will be living in areas of high water stress.

The UN is worried that squabbles over water in politically unstable areas are increasingly driving conflicts, requiring the development of new security strategies to resolve these disputes. It says the water woes could increase the risk of national and international security threats, pointing to a number of countries that could be vulnerable to conflicts over water resources, including Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, Haiti, Sri Lanka and Colombia, India, Bangladesh among others.

The report also warns that water shortages are having another unusual effect : They are beginning to constrain economic growth and affecting climate change in a big way.

Population and urban growth are among the reasons the UN agencies worry about water shortages. Every year, the world's population grows by another 80 million, with most of the growth occurring in urban areas. The report says this means the world will have "substantially more people" living in urban and coastal areas vulnerable to scarce water resources.

Another concern is the huge demand agriculture places on water resources. Already, about 70 percent of the fresh water used by people is for growing crops and raising livestock.

Within the next 30 to 50 years, there will be "substantial population displacements" due to global warming, and that those affected, whom it terms "climate-change refugees," will need new water and sanitation services.

Another problem is the lack of safe water and sewage disposal. And global warming will make things worse for third world people who are struggling hard to have access to fresh water. □□□

