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EVERY DROP COUNTS

Dear Readers,

This time on, we shift the focus on to something that no one can do without - Water. On the one hand, the melting ice caps and the consequent rise in water levels is promising to play havoc with civilisation as we know it. The rising sea level is pregnant with the possibility of inundating huge tracks of land, wiping off coastal cities and forcing migrations of a scale that is yet unimaginable. On the other hand, the shrinking land mass will create a pressure on agriculture of such a magnitude, experts opine, that we cannot even comprehend as we will have to feed many more mouths using lesser and lesser land to cultivate.

So much from the green lobby. If one were to shift focus on to the development front, the steel and the power industries will both want huge quantities of water to sustain and grow. As we cannot yet think of economic development that is not led by steel and power consumption, this is one area that needs immediate attention. Mega thermal plants that will power the Nation's surge forward are already being shifted from the mine head to the coastal areas for the lack of availability of water – a trend that is going to become the rule, rather than the exception in the years to come.

But where will the water required to make your steel come from? We have already exterminated the water levels by the wanton use of underground water for agriculture without paying adequate heed to matters of replenishment and are paying a dear price. Now if we are to add the burden of million ton steel plants drawing on the same aquifers to quench their thirst, we will only be adding to the problem, confounding confusion.

Rainwater harvesting, recycling, replenishment of aquifers, water table management, responsible usage – alas, these are mere terms that corporates use merely to make their CSR reports look more respectable, at times even unaware of the meaning and the import of the terms.

But a day will surely come when the awareness will spread. And we will embrace sustainable development on all fronts, including that of water management and will act as responsible citizens. Pepsi I am told, is already a zero drawer of water in as much that they replenish as much ground water as they draw to ensure the balance.

A company, peddling "packaged drinking water" an oxymoron in itself ,showing the way. Well, even that is acceptable if we are on the right path. Your Move, Steel plants!

By the way, how much water is required to produce every additional ton of steel? How much water does the Indian steel industry consume per annum? Add the water required to quench the coke intake. And tell me, how much water will we require when we attain the magic figure of 200 MMT? For, 300 MMT?

And roughly, how many Aquafina bottles is that equivalent to?
Go ahead enlighten me.

With Best Regards,
Suvobrata Ganguly