

# 'Healthy tension' spurred our water needs



(From left) Mr Gidon Bromberg, Professor Asit Biswas, Ms Erna Witoelar, Mr Tan Gee Paw, Mr Gerard Payen, and moderator Nik Gowing on the *BBC World News World Debate Series, Are We Running Out of Water?* PHOTO COURTESY OF BBC WORLD NEWS

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**SINGAPORE** — It was “healthy tension” with Malaysia that spurred Singapore to seek water self-sufficiency, and nations are better off if they are able to stand on their own when it comes to water needs, said national water agency PUB chairman Tan Gee Paw yesterday.

He was speaking at a recording of a *BBC World News* debate featuring global thought leaders.

And although agencies like the United Nations Development Programme have warned of water wars in areas where the resource is shared among countries, it is unlikely that tensions between countries over water will spill over into wars due to fast-advancing technology, he added.

“Relationships amongst countries are not just based on water

needs, there are many other factors,” said Mr Tan.

The prospect of conflict, however, is helpful in pushing water and sanitation issues higher up on politicians’ agendas, said Ms Erna Witoelar, former Indonesian Minister for Settlements and Regional Development.

They were two of five panelists at the recording of the *World Debate Series* — which will air on *BBC World News* on July 17 — on whether the world was running out of water.

When asked by moderator Nik Gowing if tension with Malaysia had driven Singapore to find self-sustaining solutions, Mr Tan replied: “Definitely ... it’s a tension that tells us that water is a very sensitive issue because it strikes at the heart of the survivability of a nation.”

While Singapore has been held up as a role model in pursuing water

solutions, it can do better consumption-wise, said panellist Gidon Bromberg, an Israeli environmentalist.

“Rather than using fresh water — drinking water — to flush our toilets, we could be using recycled water ... we could be developing waterless toilets rather than developing desalination plants,” said Mr Bromberg, director of Friends of the Earth in the Middle East.

Using expensive technology led by the private sector creates a “disincentive to conserve”, he said.

Singapore’s current per capita domestic water consumption is about 158 litres per day, and residents are encouraged to conserve.

The panellists — with the exception of Ms Witoelar — dismissed the prospect of the world running out of water. The real issues are about resource mismanagement and equity of access, they said.