

# Water Woes

Water is not free, but it's not illegal. Then water multinationals do not bother about legality and human cost. The Fifth World Water Forum ended amid opposition by social activists, in Istanbul, ironically though on March 22—World Water Day—with the same general declaration that it adopted in Mexico at the 4th summit three years ago. It was on 'the need to include water and sanitation as priorities in national process, particularly in national strategies for sustainable development and poverty reduction'. No doubt the Forum that takes place every three years is the world's largest water policy event but this extravaganza is organised by the World Water Council, a private organisation whose most influential members are corporate water giants and some of the world's biggest dam construction companies. Over twenty countries officially challenged the ministerial declaration issued by the all powerful Forum which defines water as a human need, through a counter-declaration. Also, People's Water Forum, a counter-weight to World Water Forum, organised protest marches and demonstrations against the 5th conference of the Forum in Istanbul to delegitimise the false corporate driven exercise and to give voice to the positive agenda of the global water justice movements.

Since 2006, in Mexico, the global water justice movement has continued to challenge corporate control of water for profit. Unless water is recognised as a fundamental right, rather a human right, the governments across the world in league with powerful water business lobby will continue to privatise water resources including rivers paving the way for water riots in the future. The next great war will be fought over water, not oil.

The water and energy policies promoted by the WWF around the globe destroy communities and environment. How big dams in India and else-where have been a source of perpetual agony for thousands of people does not need much elaboration.

Istanbul had all the potential of another Seattle much to the dismay of water tycoons. But it did not happen. Nor did anti-Forum marchers get adequate media coverage. The Turkish riot police indiscriminately used water cannons and tear gas against peaceful protestors who gathered there to shout "water for life, not for profit" in opposition to Forum's agenda of water privatisation and river destruction. Quite expectedly the Turkish authorities responded to peaceful agitation by civic society with arrest and deportation.

Meanwhile UN warns of widespread water shortages. A new report called World Water Development Report, compiled by 24 agencies of the United Nations states that while water supplies are under threat, the demand for water is increasing rapidly because of massive industrialisation, rising living standards and changing diets that include more foods, such as meat, that require larger amounts of water to produce. The people of India have reasons to worry at this juncture as the report cites a severe lack of water as a threat to growth in parts of China, India and Indonesia and commercial centres in Australia and Western United States. What is most agonising is the dramatic increase in the production

of bio-fuels. The tripling of ethanol production between 2000 and 2007 is simply frightening as a single litre of bio-fuel needs 1000 to 4000 litres of water.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) predicts a rise in the tremendous water stress to 3.9 billion by 2030, amounting to nearly half the world's population. And most of them will live in China and South Asia.

The tally however, does not include the impacts of climate change. Global warming may already be affecting weather patterns, changing the time and place where rain and snow fall. Around 2.5 billion people today do not have access to decent sanitation, defying of the targets of the UN's Millennium Goal. Severe global warming could be worst-hit as many parts of these two most populous countries could all become too warm in summer for people to lose heat by sweating-rendering such areas effectively uninhabitable.

True, water justice movement is gaining currency throughout the world but it is still too weak to deliver. Unless water is excluded from global trade agreements, water as a universal human right won't be accepted even by the UN. □□□