

### Trade Unions in Maharashtra to campaign Against the River Linking Proposals

Mumbai: Trade unions are better known for taking up issues of their employees' job security and related rights. But with the change in times the same trade unions are now becoming socially conscious. In an unprecedented move, the Service Sector Employees' Coordination Committee, a committee representing several trade unions and social organisations, in its Pani Parishad (Water Council) held in Mumbai on February 12, 2003 adopted a Declaration and pledged to create awareness on the issues of water scarcity and governance through its cadre in various parts of the state of Maharashtra in next couple of months.

The declaration expressed serious concern over the receding supply of water to a large number of townships and villages in the country and the escalating disputes on sharing of river waters between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and between Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan. Instead of coordinating village-level activities and building up an integrated plan for tackling the water problem on war footing with pragmatic considerations, supported by experience and constant innovations and activated through employment guarantee schemes, the BJP govt at the Centre has suddenly sought to revive Ganga-Cauvery link which the govt had given up 20 years ago as being absolutely unwise on techno-economic considerations, the declaration noted.

Criticising the interlinking of rivers proposal, the Pani Parishad firmly rejected the concept of treating water as an economic activity for sale in the market. Water must always be considered as national wealth entirely under the control of the whole community. Mr R G Karnik, Convener of the Coordination Committee, reiterated the need for creating a strong public opinion in favour of community-oriented comprehensive programme for enhancing the availability of water (as opposed to the centralised interlinking of rivers proposal) and its equitable distribution and generation of productive employment. Mr Karnik announced the committee's decision of holding similar meetings in Thane, Pune, Nashik, Nagpur, Kolhapur and Aurangabad in the next two months. The Pani Parishad was inaugurated by Shri R R Patil, Minister of Rural Development, Water Supply and Sanitation of the govt of Maharashtra and attended by over 200 participants representing various trade unions and employees' federations.

Dr Sudhirendar Sharma

**Govt: Ganga Cauvery Link devoid of flood control benefits** On Aug 9, 2000, while answering a question from MPs Shri DVC Shankar Rao and Shri Dilip Kumar Gandhi, Union Minister of state for Water Resources Smt Bijoya Chakravarty said: "However, Dr. K.L.Rao proposed Ganga Cauvery Link which was examined by the Central Water Commission and found to be grossly under estimated. Besides the proposal also required a large block of power and was devoid of my flood control benefits." If that is the case than why is the river link now being pushed?

**Kerala's Experience far from happy** One of the earliest instances of inter-basin transfers in the peninsular region was from the upper reaches of the Periyar to another river basin in Tamil Nadu across the Western Ghats. This was done by constructing the Mullaperiyar dam more than a century ago. This led to the deterioration of water quality downstream of the river. Salinity intrusion and pollution dispersion problems in the lower reaches of the Periyar arose due to non-availability of sufficient quantity of water for flushing. The safety of the dam structure and inundation of the eco-forest system are also aspects discussed with concern in relation to this scheme for inter-basin transfer of water. An intra-State inter-basin transfer from the Periyar to the Muvattupuzha river for power generation in Kerala has adversely affected the downstream flow in the Periyar river. (THE HINDU 111202)

**Agriculture Ministry to press for Rainwater harvesting & Riverlinking** Union Agriculture Ministry will press for creation of grid system for major rivers. Union Agriculture Minister said, "Since, interlinking of rivers will need states' consent, I will raise the issue in the forthcoming meeting of National Development Council". The Union minister said that rainwater harvesting was of equal importance and "no amount of irrigation system involving canals and reservoirs can substitute rain water". (THE ECONOMIC TIMES 160902)

**Punjab parties oppose National River Grid** All party meeting in Punjab has opposed the proposal for the National River Waters Grid and demanded scrapping of all riparian treaties signed by Punjab. It was also decided that the International Human Right Organisation and the BKU would file jointly a petition in the SC in this context. (THE TRIBUNE 150902)

**Over 500 ASF Delegates Writes to PM** On the 6<sup>th</sup> Jan 2003, over 510 delegates from over 200 organisations from all over the world attending the Asia Social Forum being held at Hyderabad wrote to the Hon'ble Prime Minister requesting him to withdraw from the proposed Interlinking of Rivers Project and rather focus on more viable options of local water system. Signatories included Medha Patkar (NBA), Rajendra Singh (Rashtriya Jal Biradari), Bela Bhatia (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies), Dr. B.D.Sharma (Bharat Jana Andolan), Ashish Nandy (CSDS), Simantini Dhuru (Film maker), K.R.Datye (SOPPECOM), Smitu Kothari (Lokayan) Anastasia Laitila (Friends of Earth), Dr. Uma Shankari (Neeti Samakhya) Shripad Dharmadhikary (Manthan), Dr Letha (Chalakyud Puzha Samarakshana Samiti), SANDRP, etc. The Prime Minister's response is awaited.

**NAPM opposes Riverlink proposals** "The National Alliance of People's Movements will oppose the interlinking-rivers project, as we consider it as the stepping stone for the privatization of water. The project is destructive for the nation's economy and environment", said Medha Patkar in a press conference in Bhubaneswar during the 'Desh Bachao-Desh Banao' campaign. The campaign urged the central govt not to push the project. (NAPM PR 270203)