

PEOPLES' CAMPAIGN FOR RIGHT TO WATER

Report

Mass Protest Rally held against anti-people Water Laws and Policies of Karnataka and the US Water Trade Mission

Urban development Minister reiterates opposition to Water Privatisation and distances Government from US Mission

28 February 2011

(Click on [Facebook link](#) to view pictures of the protest)



The peoples' campaign for right to water (PCRW), the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS) and Samatha Sainika Dala (SSD) organized a mass protest rally in Bangalore against pro-corporate water laws and policies of Karnataka and the US water Trade Mission to the state. More than 2500 people from across the state participated in the rally which started by blocking the BWSSB head office on KG Road in a symbolic gesture to save the public water works from being taken over by private companies.

Kodihalli Chandrasheka, the leader of the KRRS and M. Venkatswamy of the SSD and Rajendran Prabakar of PCRW inaugurated the rally by warning BWSSB not to compromise on its legal mandate of being responsible for water and sanitation services in the metropolitan area of Bangalore.

The plan to privatize Operation and Maintenance of water services in Bangalore in the name of leakage reduction was singled out by the speakers. It was communicated to the BWSSB that any plans to privatize Bangalore will be met with intense protests by the people of the city. This was the first such demonstration against the recent plans by BWSSB to privatise its services. (Read background on this below.)

Minister rushes from Assembly to meet Rally:

The rally was over a kilometer long and energetically and enthusiastically moved from BWSSB Hq. on Kempe Gowda Road in the center of the city, past the central bus stand and closed in on the Taj West End, the venue of the US water trade mission. Alarmed by the response to the protest call, Mr. Suresh

Kumar, Karnataka Minister for Urban Development and Law Affairs and the in-charge minister of BWSSB rushed to the spot. The leaders of the rally and community members from different parts of the state questioned the minister about the privatization processes and put forth the following demands:



Constitutional mandate in the management of water resources and its rightful access to the user.

1. It is the constitutional responsibility of the state as the custodian of water as commons, to implement policies and practices that promote ecological justice and equity in access and distribution of water. The campaign demands that the Karnataka Urban Drinking Water and Sanitation Policy 2002 be completely repealed and the state be obliged to fully and faithfully comply with
2. The Operation and Maintenance (O and M) of water services in Hubli, Dharwad, Belgaum and Gulbarga has been undemocratically handed over to Veolia, a multi-national French company. The entire water services in Mysore have also been given away similarly questionably to JUSCO, a TATA Company. The campaign demands an immediate remunicipalisation of all water and sanitation services that have been handed over to private companies and a complete stop to plans that further privatise water and sanitation services across Karnataka, including those proposed for Bangalore.
3. The campaign demands that the US Water Trade Mission to Bangalore be cancelled. The campaign also demands that there should not be any participation of elected representatives and bureaucrats of the Government of Karnataka in the event. Any such participation would amount to GoK's solidarity with the American plan to commodify, control and trade with our waters.
4. Thousands of public taps have been removed to ensure a monopoly by water companies on water distribution.. This has had devastating impacts on the lives of the poor who were dependent on these taps. The campaign demands that all these public taps be restored and good quality and sufficient water be supplied to poorer localities across the state.

To these demands the Minister responded by promising to invite various peoples' movements and the water campaign for a review of the policy of 2002. He also promised to look into all the processes required to reverse the privatization agreements in the various cities of Karnataka soon after the current

Legislative Assembly session gets over. He said he is absolutely opposed to water privatization and that he will not allow the water of the state to be corporatized or commodified.

On the US Water Trade Mission, the Minister admitted that he came to know of it only recently and that too from officials of BWSSB. He asserted that neither he nor his officials will participate in the Mission meetings. (In an interesting development, it is learnt that as a result of the campaign the controversial US Mission has changed the meeting venue to another hotel to avoid facing the campaigners.)



The campaign members agreed to the minister's request to provide the minister time till after the session to initiate these processes. The campaigners signaled a strong warning to the Minister against terming O and M agreements with private companies as piece work contracts. As O and M constitutes the process by which drinking water is provided to people, and this activity is the fundamental rationale for the existence of water boards

working under city municipalities, any move to outsource this amounts to serious dereliction of the Constitutional responsibilities of the State. There is no dispute that such actions constitute privatization and handing over life sustaining asset for private profiteering..

The campaign members resolved to pursue the matter with the Minister till all demands were met. The Campaign also demanded withdrawal of any Legislative move (such Bangalore Regional Governance Bill) which contained amendments that promoted privatisation of vital public services.

Backdoor efforts to privatise Bangalore water supply:

Through active participation of people in the city, the campaign had during 2005-06 stopped earlier plans of the government to privatize water and sanitation in the eight urban local bodies that were merged into Bangalore to form Greater Bangalore (BBMP). The GBWASP as the project was called was initiated by the International Financial Corporation – the private lending branch of the World Bank, KUIDFC – Karnataka Urban Infrastructure and Finance Corporation and Janaagraha, a local pro-corporate NGO. While in the final stages of handing over Bangalore to a private company, the campaign mobilized people against such an illegal and heinous act. The privatization plan was put on hold and the then chairperson of BWSSB Mr. Ashok Manoli made a report admitting that the pressure was exercised on the Board to privatise drinking water provisioning. That report had admitted to BWSSB's capabilities in

providing services to the greater Bangalore area at one-third the cost demanded by private corporations. Five years later, the same privatization effort is being attempted now through a back door entry of a project ubiquitously titled 'leakage reductuin'.

On behalf of the Campaign,

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PS: You may sign on to the Memorandum to the CM, and review comments at this [link](#).

