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## Commercial financing of water supply in developing countries Protests disrupt proceedings

By Keya Acharya KYOTO, March 21

With candlelight protests against the ongoing bombing of Iraq happening informally at the venue of the 3rd World Water Forum, loud protests, banners and slogans from activists disrupted proceedings inside declaring the principles of the 'Camdessus Report' which outlines financing of water supply in developing countries through private sector multinational companies.

The World Water Forums began in 1997 on the initiative of Morocco's late King Hasan in an effort to bring world attention to water needs and its conservation in developing countries.

Held every three years, the 3rd World Water Forum, following one in The Hague in 2000, is currently being held simultaneously at Kyoto, Osaka and Shiga in Japan. The 'Camdessus Report' worked out by a panel of 20 members mostly private financiers, multinational chiefs and development bankers headed by former IMF director Michael Camdessus, advocates national governments to provide guarantees to water MNCs to cover the risks from currency fluctuations in the international market.

And very controversially asks governments to relinquish holds over respective water systems. "There is no other way we can rise to the challenge of halving the world's population without access to water by 2005", said Mr. Camdessus. The Report is due to be endorsed shortly as a public declaration by Ministers from approximately 168 countries, including India's Minister for Water Resources, Mr. Arjun Sethi.

Estimating an additional annual \$100b to the \$80b assessed by international donors as financial aid needed to bring water to the poor in developing countries, the report asks everyone concerned to double their financial contributions.

"We are also asking governments to demonstrate a very high sense of leadership and establish credible regulations," said Camdessus "Increasing tariffs are necessary for loan-repayment", said ADB Chairman Mr. Tadao Chino, adding that high-end users should cross-subsidise rates for low-income users.

RIOTING: But in the backdrop of rioting in Bolivia against citizens being cut off due to inability to pay the 300% increase in tariffs, activists from Bolivia and Argentina were vociferous at the hearing today. "You are outlining how to guarantee profits to the private sector and not worried about bringing water and sanitation to the poor in our countries", said participant Pablo from Bolivia.

Worldwide, 2.6 billion people have no access to sanitation, 1.2 billion are without

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"Wit is educational insolvency."

safe drinking-water and the UN's goal emphasised at their Summit in Johannesburg in 2002 is to halve these numbers by 2015. The 'Camdessus Report' is aimed at this target. "There is hardly any mention of low-cost sanitation and hygiene for the poor", said Water Supply & Sanitary Collaborative Council's Sir Richard Jolly to the Press in a special message.

" Handpumps, wells, rainwater harvesting are technologies that need only indirect support through promotion and awareness of simple low-cost designing," said Jolly. India's relationship with foreign water multinationals has been short-lived so far.

UNACCOUNTED WATER: The MoU between BWSSB and French multinationals Suez and Vivendi have recently collapsed. BWSSB sources cite the multinational's high costs as a reason, while Suez sources, both on condition of anonymity, hint at corruption and 'an unwillingness' to streamline BWSSB's huge percentage of unaccounted water supply (44% of its total water supply).

Suez Lyonnaise has very recently withdrawn its branches from India.

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