

waterpoints

Mozambique's first water-privatization contract awarded

Mozambique has awarded its first US\$117m (£74m) water privatization concession in the country's seven largest cities (Maputo, Beira, Quelimane, Nampula, Pemba, Matola and Dondo) to the Aguas de Mocambique (ADM) consortium. ADM will be responsible for tariff collection and for upgrading and extending the water-supply infrastructure. The Government promised that none of the country's current 850 water-workers would lose their jobs. A watchdog would protect consumer interests, regulate the contract, and set minimum service standards. The state-operated water companies would be dismantled on 30 November 1999. The contract was funded in full through a grant provided by the World Bank, African Development Bank, Dutch Government and the European Union — privatization was a precondition.

Biological mosquito control

The introduction of guppy fish and duckweed in drains and surface-water bodies may help contain outbreaks of dengue and malaria in Dhaka, according to experts who are urging the Government to lessen dependence on chemical pesticides and 'to immediately launch environment-friendly integrated mosquito management (IMM) programmes'. The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) spends US\$1m on mosquito-control projects every year, while Dhaka's citizens spend US\$14.2m on aerosols and US\$79.6m on mosquito coils.

National arsenic-screening launched in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has launched a national drive to test tubewells across the country for arsenic contamination, identify patients suffering from arsenic poisoning, and educate communities about how to deal with the problem. The national screening programme is funded by the Government of Bangladesh, the World Bank, and the Swiss Development Corporation under auspices of the Bangladesh Arsenic-

Mitigation Water-Supply Project.

Bangladesh is facing what has been described as the largest mass poisoning in history. Groundwater, the main source of drinking-water, is suspected to be contaminated by naturally occurring arsenic in 59 out of Bangladesh's 64 districts and an estimated 20 million out of Bangladesh's 127 million people are at risk.

Oil companies contaminate water

India's two largest oil exploration companies have been charged with discharging toxic effluents from drilling sites and indiscriminately flaring natural gas in eastern Assam. The petrol pollution is entering drinking-water and affecting the region's tea plantations (Assam produces 15 per cent of the world's tea). The companies in question, the state-run Oil India Limited (OIL) and the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), both lack adequate effluent-treatment plants. Villagers at Kaliapani attribute health problems such as tuberculosis, respiratory problems, and cancer to drinking-water pollution. The companies claim they conform to safety measures set up by the pollution control board.

Water top environmental concern for Y2K

In a specially commissioned survey for UNEP's Global Environment Outlook 2000 (GEO-2000), 200 scientists from 50 countries identified water as the most pressing environmental issue for the next century. Although climate change (51 per cent) was the leading single issue, taken together, freshwater scarcity (29 per cent) and freshwater pollution (28 per cent) ranked higher. GEO-2000 also quotes the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) which predicts that two out of three people will live in water-stressed conditions by the year 2025 if there is no change to current consumption patterns. In Africa 300 million people are short of water, 14 countries are subject to water stress or water scarcity, and a further 11 will join them by 2025. In West Asia the pace of population growth far exceeds the development of water resources. The report also emphasizes linkages to other environmental issues such as land management and climate change.

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