

Indefinite protest against Coca Cola (23 March 2006 onwards....)

Dear Friends

We, the people of Mehandiganj wish to bring the attention of our countrymen and of the whole world to the glaring example of an impending World Danger of Drinking Water in the form of its open commercialization by Coca Cola and Pepsi Companies. In fact the problem is not new to you, neither is your collaboration with us in our struggle against it, new. Yet we would like you to note some facts concerning the present condition both of the depletion of water and of our struggle against it.

The Hindustan Coca Cola company established its bottling plant in Mehandiganj village of Varanasi District of Uttar Pradesh, North India, in 1995. Ever since, the people of the place have been constantly protesting against it. **The reasons for protest are manifold.**

1. Illegal Possession of Village Land

The Company has forcefully occupied more than 33 decimal of village land despite the resistance and notices of the village authorities. District authority and the Court had found them guilty and issued notices to return this public land. But the money power of the company had no troubles in keeping the land against this country's law and people.

The company had also escaped with the theft of stamp duty worth rupees one crore five lacs and seventy five thousand. Interestingly the Varanasi court had a judgment passed against them in this regard to pay a penalty of Rs. 3,01,50,000/- on 3 March 2003, which the company's underhand power has succeeded to ignore to this day!!!

2. Coca Cola's enormously Polluting Waste

The company had made false publicity among the villagers that their waste would be so pure as edible and manure. But the experiments and experiences have proved to the whole world that not only their waste but the Cola itself is poisonous!, that the polluted water which the company releases contains heavy content of Cadmium and lead which has in fact destroyed the entire agricultural crops of the area causing unbearable losses to the village farmers. Surveys have already manifested that various intestinal and skin diseases increase in the surrounding villages during the last five years. Many written complaints on this fact have been made to the administration. Both administration and Pollution Board have made study and discovered the truth of the sicknesses and losses. Despite all these documented facts none of these machineries have ever succeeded to take even a single step to take action against the company, nor to give compensation to the poor villagers.

3. Coca Cola's unjust management against its Employees

Coca Cola is one of the highest profit making multinational companies of the world. But the local people have come to experience the cut-throat behaviors of the company to its employees. It has kept all its workers as non permanent. When the employees took steps to unite to demand for just wages, the company dared to use illegal forces, dismissed many and got 13 of its employee leaders implicate in fictitious crimes and court cases for which they are still being troubled.

4. Depletion of Ground Water by Coca Cola for Commercial purposes.

The most heinous crime against the people of Mehandiganj and against the whole of our country is the massive exploitation of ground water, about 250,000 liters of water per day! This colossal use of ground water has dried up open wells and run down the level of bore wells from 30 feet to 50 feet, in this Gangetic Plain so that more than 20 villages are undergoing terrible scarcity of water not only for irrigation but also for drinking! The drought of last two years has worsened this situation leaving people with no alternative than to drive away the exploiters of their drinking water!!

5. The Shamefully Poor Response of the Government to these Problems

The government of Uttar Pradesh has been saying that they are concerned about the awful condition of drinking water in the state, and is considering closing deep wells of the government for the sake of the shallow wells of the people.

The fact is that when water is drawn for irrigation only 8 to 10% of the water is used for crops, all the rest 90% returns to the source. But commercialization and chemicalization of water uses the total content of the water drawn out. We have only one question to the UP government, "Is it in a position to stop commercialization of ordinary people's drinking water by Coca Cola"??

A parliamentary committee under the leadership of H'ble Sharad Pawar had found that Pepsi and Coke contained heavy contents of poisonous contents after a study on the recommendation of the NGO institution CSI. But all that the whole parliament could do was to remove these soft drinks from their canteens, hinting as if to the whole country that even if the entire nation goes to doom, what concerns to them is their own welfare!!

Mehandiganj's Struggles against the Monster of Coca Cola

The people of Mehandiganj have been holding peaceful protests against Coca Cola according to the norms of democracy ever since they started to see the deadly dangers it is spreading in the whole area. The Mehandiganj panchayat had unanimously passed a resolution to cancel the license of the company in May 2005. But the state government behaved as a domestic dog of the company and used brutal violence on the peacefully protesting people of the place and on their supporters, beating up men and women alike, locking them up and suing them in the court with fake criminal cases.

Now it has become clear to the people of Mehandiganj and to the whole common man of the country that our government is bought cheap by such companies and their mafia to the extent that people are left with one single option to FIGHT UNTO DEATH, for their own survival. Now people and all People's Movements have determined to fight the decisive battle. Now the government which runs with each hard earned penny of the common people and their vote, will have to make a public decision whether it is with the people or with the companies who fill their pockets. Now is the time to prove that power of justice and truth is still with the people and not with any corrupt politician.

On this occasion we wish to bring the attention of our countrymen and of the whole world to the glaring example of an impending World Danger of Drinking Water in the form of its open commercialization by Coca Cola and Pepsi Companies. In fact the problem is not new to you, neither is your collaboration with us in our struggle against it, new. Yet we would like to bring

your attention to some facts concerning the present condition both of the depletion of water and of our struggle against it.

So we the people of Mehandiganj have determined to sit on strike in front of the Hindustan Coca Cola Bottling Plant at Mehandiganj indefinitely until the following demands of our people are fulfilled by the government.

1. Cancel the license of Coca Cola company
2. Prohibit Coca Cola company from its daily exploitation of 25 lac liters of ground water.
3. Release the public land illegally occupied by the company from the village panchayat of Mehandiganj
4. Stop the pollution caused by the wastes of Coca Cola, and compensate the people of Mehandiganj for the losses of life and crops.
5. Deposit the dwindled stamp duty of rupees three crores one and half lac into the treasury immediately
6. Take back all the fake cases into which Coca Cola has dragged our peaceful protesters, and its employees.

March 23 is the historical day of the victorious martyrdom of Sardar Bhagat Singh, the symbol of daring Indian determination for freedom. This is also the birthday of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia the symbol of people's revolution in the Free India. March 22, just the preceding day is dedicated for the awareness of Drinking Water of the World. Incidentally related is also the series of World Social Forum gatherings in Pakistan, South Africa and Brazil starting from 23 March. We find no better auspicious day to initiate this indefinite struggle of our people against injustice and exploitation.

Hence may we request you to ensure your participation in this revolution physically with your presence and symbolically with your encouragement, support and contribution.

Yours truly,

LOK SAMITI, VARANASI
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SAJHA SANSKRITI MANCH
NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF PEOPLES MOVEMENTS
AND ALL WELL-WISHERS AND COLLABORATORS

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