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**CONCOURS SUR TITRES ET TRAVAUX  
POUR LE RECRUTEMENT  
DE COMMISSAIRES CONTROLEURS DES ASSURANCES**



***SESSION 2009***



**ÉPREUVE ORALE D'ADMISSION DU 15 MAI 2009**



COMMENTAIRE EN ANGLAIS  
D'UN TEXTE REDIGÉ EN LANGUE ANGLAISE REMIS AU CANDIDAT,  
SUIVI D'UNE CONVERSATION EN ANGLAIS  
PORTANT SUR DES QUESTIONS D'ACTUALITÉ



(Préparation 10 minutes  
Durée : 20 minutes - Coefficient : 1)



## Water

### **Sin aqua non**

Apr 8th 2009 | ISTANBUL  
From The Economist print edition

#### **Water shortages are a growing problem, but not for the reasons most people think**

THE overthrow of Madagascar's president in mid-March was partly caused by water problems—in South Korea. Worried by the difficulties of increasing food supplies in its water-stressed homeland, Daewoo, a South Korean conglomerate, signed a deal to lease no less than half Madagascar's arable land to grow grain for South Koreans. Widespread anger at the terms of the deal (the island's people would have received practically nothing) contributed to the president's unpopularity. One of the new leader's first acts was to scrap the agreement.

Three weeks before that, on the other side of the world, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger of California declared a state of emergency. Not for the first time, he threatened water rationing in the state. "It is clear," says a recent report by the United Nations World Water Assessment Programme, "that urgent action is needed if we are to avoid a global water crisis."

Local water shortages are multiplying. Australia has suffered a decade-long drought. Brazil and South Africa, which depend on hydroelectric power, have suffered repeated brownouts because there is not enough water to drive the turbines properly. So much has been pumped out of the rivers that feed the Aral Sea in Central Asia that it collapsed in the 1980s and has barely begun to recover.

Yet local shortages, caused by individual acts of mismanagement or regional problems, are one thing. A global water crisis, which impinges on supplies of food and other goods, or affects rivers and lakes everywhere, is quite another. Does the world really face a global problem?

#### **Water, water everywhere...**

Not on the face of it. There is plenty of water to go around and human beings are not using all that much. Every year, thousands of cubic kilometres (km<sup>3</sup>) of fresh water fall as rain or snow or come from melting ice. According to a study in 2007, most nations outside the Gulf were using a fifth or less of the water they receive—at least in 2000, the only year for which figures are available. The global average withdrawal of fresh water was 9% of the amount that flowed through the world's hydrologic cycle. Both Latin America and Africa used less than 6% (see table). On this evidence, it would seem that all water problems are local.

The trouble with this conclusion is that no one knows how much water people can safely use. It is certainly not 100% (the amount taken in Gulf states) because the rest of creation also has to live off the water. In many places the maximum may well be less than one fifth, the average for Asia as a whole. It depends on how water is returned to the system, how much is taken from underground aquifers, and so on.

But there is some admittedly patchy evidence that, given current patterns of use and abuse, the amount now being withdrawn is moving dangerously close to the limit of safety—and in some places beyond it. An alarming number of the world's great rivers no longer reach the sea. They include the Indus, Rio Grande, Colorado, Murray-Darling and Yellow rivers. These are the arteries of the world's main grain-growing areas.

Freshwater fish populations are in precipitous decline. According to the World Wide Fund for Nature, fish stocks in lakes and rivers have fallen roughly 30% since 1970. This is a bigger population fall than that suffered by animals in jungles, temperate forests, savannahs and any other large ecosystem. Half the world's wetlands, on one estimate, were drained, damaged or destroyed in the 20th century, mainly because, as the volume of fresh water in rivers falls, salt water invades the delta, changing the balance between fresh and salt water. On this evidence, there may be systemic water problems, as well as local disruptions.