The number of massive encroachments in the Mahaweli river reservations and Polgolla reservoir reservations are increasing but the Mahaweli Authority has not taken any steps to prevent the encroachments, environmentalists complained. Many environmentalists were of the view that the construction of hotels along the river bank has multiplied alarmingly in the recent past, with political backing without any consideration on their environmental impacts.


Shantha Ratnayake environmental lawyer said that 60 metres radius from the Mahaweli River was declared as river reservations under the Mahaweli Act and it continues under the purview of the Mahaweli Authority. He added that it is prohibited to develop any land within 60 metres radius from Mahaweli River reservations and within 100 metres radius from the Polgolla Reservoir and therefore nobody can carry out any construction. He added, "Nevertheless, one and half kilometers along the Getambe-Katagasthota road, there are illegal constructions in the river reservation area."

In a letter addressed to the Director General of the Mahaweli Authority, the Lawyers for Environmentalists have mentioned that many tourist hotels are being built along the bank of Mahaweli River and the Polgolla and Victoria reservoirs. They have informed the authorities that there are ongoing constructions most of which have started during last couple of months. According to the Lawyers for Environmentalists, as a first step, the constructions start out side the reservation areas and gradually build into the river reservations in the second step so that the constructions would not be stopped at the initial stages. The Sunday Leader also learns that some people have dug the area near the reservoir on 09.04.2014 to build a road.

An environmentalist added that along the river bank of the river from Getambe temple to Katagasthota Bridge especially in the 2nd Rajasinghe Mawatha there are numerous encroachments. He added that along the river bank there is lot of biodiversity and the encroachments are a great threat to the river conservation and biodiversity in the area. He also added that some of these hotels and private dwellings along the river bank discharge waste into the river, polluting the water which affect the fish species in the river.

A member of an environmental organisation in the area said that there are many ongoing constructions in the area that clearly violate the Mahaweli Act and do not conform to any of the requirements. He added, "Most of these constructions are carried out using political influences and some of the hotels are owned by politicians and that is a major reason why the Mahaweli Authority remains silent regarding this matter." He accused the Mahaweli Authority for not being involved in such wrong dealings. According to him, the encroachments have increased drastically in the recent past.

"We have number of requirements that includes an Environmental Impact Assessment. If the construction plan conforms to all our requirements we give approval to those private individuals to carry out the construction."

Director General of the Mahaweli Authority said that the area between Getambe Bridge and Katagastha Bridge comes under the purview of Mahaweli Authority. However most of the lands along the river banks are private lands and if those individuals want to do any constructions or develop their land, they have to get the approval of the Mahaweli Authority. He added, "We have number of requirements that includes an Environmental Impact Assessment. If the construction plan conforms to all our requirements we give approval to those private individuals to carry out the construction."

He added that the individuals who are seeking approval for constructions or any development to their land need to apply for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) through the Central Environmental Authority and then get the EIA done by an institute that is assigned by the Central Environmental Authority. However, he added that at present there may be some encroachment into the river reservations illegally but he assured that the Mahaweli Authority will take action against such encroachments.

Director General of the Central Environmental Authority, Dr. Sanaga Alahapperuma added that the Mahaweli river reservation is totally under the purview of the Mahaweli Authority. He added that the Mahaweli Authority has the power to authorise any constructions in the river reservation, even to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) through the Central Environmental Authority. He said that the Mahaweli Authority has the power to involve in such wrong dealings. He accused the Mahaweli Authority for neglecting to perform their duties.