Eppawala, Fundamental Rights, and NGOs

R. U. Wickramasinghe

Everybody's talking about Eppawala. The newspapers are full of it and the TNL has taken the subject. Before long, the Courts, and the ballot boxes that some one forgot to stuff, will be full of it too.

A lot of canvassing has been going on for some time by the sponsors of the project. Freeport-McMoran/IMC-Agrico, the BOJ and the Ministry of Industrial Development, (but not the Ministry of Agriculture or Environment), have been shilling the licence to mine the apatite at Eppawala, Lanka Phosphates Ltd. We are told that an advertising company has been hired to do the job. Several newspapers have been paid premium advertising rates to carry hand-outs as "news reports." The militant "geons" who appeared recently at a seminar of the Sri Lanka Economists' Association, had appeared in more militant style at Eppawala many moons ago. As it became clear a few days ago, they remain as immediate presence in and around that village. The policemen hosed at the base of a "peaceful crowd" remain on call - by the geons.

Much cash has been handed out by the local agents for Freeport-McMoran. But the sum of all that could have been minted out of Jim Bob Moffit's baby-sitter's grandchild's till without the child noticing the losses.

They say that there are a thousand ways of killing a cat, and we may take it for granted that those who are supporting this scam will try them all. They are, after all, trying to make several billions of dollars out of somebody else's property, and to displace the people of the surrounding area, leaving behind mountains and rivers of toxic waste.

The toxins will spread, not only over the 56 sq. miles of phosphates mining area, but over another 170 sq. km. (that's the Alattahena, Katta and Kala Weva area), and the-stage in the Galawaththa, the Kala Oya, the Mahaweli Oya, and the Giant's Tank. The fields in their command areas will be rendered unsuitable for human habitation.

So many strands, every one of them dedicated to the judgment of the natural Rata civilization.

It should deal with only one: the claim made by a spokesman for IMC Agrico that Freeport-McMoran has been "bitten" over them and that Freeport has no shares in it. This move was almost certainly prompted by the bad press that Freeport's got on its operations in Lithuania, Florida, Louisiana and other jurisdictions. Such trusts have been convicted unto military encampments that protect the creation of toxic-dumps that have destroyed the native people and their cultures as well as their right to life. But, if Freeport's record is horrendous, IMC-Agrico's is worse.

Freeport's record can be put succinctly as follows: 1. Quote from: "A Pocket Guide To Environmental Bad Guys," by James Ridgeway & Jeffrey St. Clair, NY, 1995. It is a way of that book, Michael Denny says: "The earth isn't dirty: it's being killed and the people doing the killing have names, faces and corporations/they hide behind and we intend to tell you who they are and how they do it: They opt for direct exposure of the "secret affiliation of millionaires and billionaires" and the lobbyin/ and "environmentalists" groups they bandyly partially pay to further their polluting, defaming and otherwise doppleganging the Commons for genetic profit.

"The corporate practice of 'green-washing' comes in for some well-needed expensive, well. And, also exposed, the shameless efforts of Teflon Green groups who had in millions of corporate dollars to ensure that the shields stick anywhere but in its creature.

"The book doesn't just tout out the facts and the bad actors, it offers hope, as well. A major part of the book is highlighting the green roots, responsible green who are making a difference against huge odds--the book is selected.

And a Few Ideas on How to Stop Them.

Expect the reaches were accomplished at the light of such a book to run for cover. They firmly break out the contact attack with assaults on the authors from the "Wise Old"-s, invents on one hand to the house-broken "expert" on the order. It behoves the average, no-breathing, water-drinking citizen to read this book and further their own self-defense.

Back to the book itself: "Freeport McMoran had itself, its American gold holdings in 1990 to concentrate on its operations in Indonesia, where it owns the world's largest gold, copper mine, the Grasberg Mine. The company's activities have sparked criticism from international environmentalists and groups.

Ven. Piyathana Thero, incumbent of the Galkadawala Temple in Eppawala who is leading the resistance to the Free Port McMoran phosphate mining project in the area and Sarath Fernando of a National Farmer Organisation.

HIT organisations, who have secured F-M of poisoning water supplies with arsenic mine wastes, destruction of ritual villages, and forced relocation of thousands of native Amungue people. To help feed off international campaigns against the company, Freeport has launched its board of directors with high profile "Gentleman" such as Henry Krissinger.

Moffit's annual salary, net of perks, is $41 million, a figure that's obviously far lower than the proclaimed foreign exchange earnings through the proposed "deal," but much higher than what we are in fact likely to get.

Indeed, in May 1997, the Attorney General, Mr. Satish N. Silva was then the incumbent), having spelt out in detail to the Ministry of Industrial Development the one-sided nature of the proposed Mineral Investment Agreement with IMC-Agrico and Tonics Corporation, had also pointed out that it was in violation of a number of National Laws, and concluded that: [3] The revenue that Lanka Phosphates Ltd. expects to obtain through dividends, or subsequently through taxation, may never materialise; and, foreign exchange, the Government's expectation of increased foreign exchange earnings arising from the foreign exchange earnings not be a favourable impact on the balance of payments, would not be realised.

If "IMC-Agrico" believed that the proposed rip-off could be shielded from our people by dressing itself from the bad odours generated by Freeport everywhere, please read on. This touches also on the relative value placed on human life by "Western Democrats," as well as on "The Racial Bias of Pollution." Each year the US generates 2.8 billion pounds of toxic waste. A 1997 report by the United Church of Christ found that hazardous waste-generating plants are twice as likely to be located in communities with high populations of blacks and Hispanics.

Nowhere is this more starkly illustrated than in St. John Parish, Louisiana, in the heart of "cancer alley." It already harbours 11 chemical plants that emit 24 million pounds of toxics a year, including Occidental, Freeport McMoran, Chevron and Texaco. It is home also to the IMC-Agrico fertilizer plant, which, until its operations were curtailed in 1995, held the distinction of being the most toxic plant in America, discharging 174 million pounds of poisons into the Mississippi every year.

Well, we also know that many NGOs are funded by major polluters of the environment and are engaged in not altogether covert efforts to sabotage environment protection legislation. There can be no doubt that some of their off-shoots in this country are actively engaged in trying to make it possible for the IMC-Agrico-Freeport McMoran-BOJ project to proceed.

What's to be done? Some might argue that geons, in whatever guise they may appear, must be answered to the only language they seem to understand - with pons. For those of us who value the environment in which the Nowara Kalaviya has been sustained over the centuries, gans can only create further havoc in the lives of our people from Point Pedro to Doneda Head. Among other options, besides the on-going actions within the country, and, keeping in mind that even such NGOs as the "World Wildlife Fund" have been on the take, those who are actively engaged in combating the global predators and their centres in and around national governments, could also get in touch with such organisations as "Protest Underground", "Earth First!", and the "International Rivers Network", and harness their support against IMC-Agrico and Tonics, which have an unashamed record of shifting on the earth, and Freeport McMoran which claims to have paved in the Aral Sea.

It is time that the intervention of the international community was harnessed towards the termination of any further "negotiations" with these criminal companies.