

Colombo canals for sewerage disposal?

Very recently the newspapers reported a breakdown in the sewerage system of Colombo in the Wellawatta-Dehiwala area. It also said that the whole sewerage system in Colombo is at bursting at seams. Is that the reason why the authorities are turning a blind eye to residents along Colombo's canal banks using the canals for sewerage disposal in their premises? I mean Torrington Canal North along which the government built a line of houses right on the reservation for which lands on the opposite side have been unfairly acquired by the government.

On 13th of May I lodged an official complaint with the Engineer SLLRDC, Director General National Environmental Authority, Director General U.D.A. and the Engineer, Colombo Municipal Council about a cess-pit being constructed on the canal bank reservation right opposite my house. As I could see from the balcony of my house a deep pit of about five feet depth and four by four had been dug on the canal reservation right up to the steel piles which support the reinforced canal bank.

After my complaint, work stopped obviously, there having been an inspection of the place by authorities on the following day. Three days later, on 16th May, the owner of the house concerned has made an application to the SLLRDC asking for authority to have a pipeline to the canal and permission has been granted for a two inch pipe outlet on condition that no household water (bath or otherwise) is drained into canal and it is used only for disposal of rain water, and machines would be used to cut the concrete to lay the pipe. The latter condition is already being violated. Obviously, the request for a rain water outlet is a cover up for the offence of unauthorised digging and the attempt to pollute the canal.

Anyway, the unauthorized digging of the canal bank remains as it is and one wonders why and what the authorities have doing about it. It is to be seen if the outlet will be used only for the authorized purpose. A number of houses on this canal bank on the same side (These were built on the canal reservation by the government itself) drain their bathroom effluence to this canal as could be seen at anytime of the day. This is a major cause for the pollution of



the canal and loss of fish and aquatic life which once swarmed this canal. One household had the audacity to fix a toilet straight into the canal. Residents on this side of the canal complained and the Environment Foundation was ready to offer them legal advice to file a case against the offender in the courts. The matter was attended to by the authorities immediately.

How is that in the present case there is silence about regarding the cess-pit / soakage pit and it remains without being closed and nothing done about the unauthorized digging of the reservation? Sometime back I was threatened with legal action because the Electrical Department men had placed some branches on the canal bank. I was warned to remove them by that day failing which, they said they would file action the very next day. So quick was the response of the SLLRDC over that! Are the authorities having different standards?

There are problems keeping the canal environment clean as promised by the authorities, particularly in view of action by un-civic minded people. Sometime back, the canal was so dirty that it drew the attention of a television

channel and early next morning, municipal workers were busy attending to it though it was really not their problem. In addition, this stretch of the canal bank has become a haven for mobile drug peddlers and prostitutes on three wheels. One has to think twice, before getting out of the house, even for an evening stroll!

What is the response from the Director General, National Environment Authority? I was a member of the National Environmental Council and its pro-tem Chairman many times. At least they should have responded to my complaint for that sake alone. And the UDA and the CMC? What have they done about this matter?

One cannot simply watch and keep mum, when affluents are being emptied into the canal right opposite our houses. Are we to seek a legal remedy with the assistance of the Environmental Foundation? Or, call the television channel?

Why?

Aren't four 'bodies' directly concerned with this problem?

D. G. de Silva