

Eppawala: who is behind it?

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The article by Gamini Seneviratne ("Eppawala - the sum of it all" 3/26/00) lays to rest any reason for supporting the proposed exploitation of Eppawala except mental incompetence and/or unethical intention.

But it leaves one question hanging in the air: Who exactly are these "foreign investors" who want to destroy one of Sri Lanka's ancient treasures?

If they actively refuse to sign their own names to the Mineral Investment Agreement (MIA), how could any right-minded official even consider entering into it with them?

If not the American company, nor the individuals who represent that company, then who exactly IS going to sign the MIA? Has anyone even verified their bank accounts and passports?

Literally the first response I had to my "Americans for Eppawala" website (<http://people.whitman.edu/~walterjs/>), in February 1998, was an angry telephone call from Freeport-McMoran's Vice President of Communications, Garland Robinette, who introduced himself as phoning from "Freeport-McMoran in New Orleans" then proceeded to insist that



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there is no "Freeport-McMoran"! His technical point was merely that several months prior to this conversation Freeport-McMoran, Inc. staged a complex series of name changes and mergers by which it extricated the name "Freeport-McMoran" itself from the various aspects of the Eppawala scheme.

This was after "negotiating" the plot for more than a decade. Presumably trying to dodge the criticisms they

knew this latest deal would attract, they officially turned "the project" over to the (equally notorious) fertilizer division of IMC-Global (another long-associated and overlapping company) called IMC-Agrico.

Three McMoran officials including mastermind "Jim Bob" Moffett were appointed to the IMC-Global Board as part of this sleight-of-hand, and as far as I can tell the actual people who stand to profit from this scheme, a handful of rich American businessmen, remain largely the same as those who have "negotiated" it from the beginning, whatever they may call themselves (for the first decade of the "negotiations" it was indeed "Freeport-McMoran, Inc.")

Despite all the fiction involved in this series of names (and there are even more of them still), Mr. Robinette concluded his telephone call by demanding that I remove the name "Freeport-McMoran" from the website! Who is to be bothered if Freeport-McMoran does not even exist? Ultimately, only those gullible advocates in Sri Lanka who believe that when they peel back the layers of a banana tree they will find something

tangible at its core.

But, you may ask, what's in a name? Well, in the present case, all responsibility whatsoever for the human suffering and environmental devastation which this plan is CERTAIN to cause. And that is why the first stage in the "exploitation" of the Eppawala phosphate deposit, which has already been completed, was to create this fiction within which the whole "deal" would proceed. The name of the men who came, who saw, who conquered Eppawala, and Trincomalee (and we'd need to be psychics to figure out what else they may do to the island thirty years down the road): that name is going to matter.

After all, in the rhetoric of "wait and see, wait and trust us" being spouted by IMC-Agrico's Mr. Pig and his local collaborators (and by Tomen Corporation in Japan), the bottom line is always made out to be the law; we will act within the law, they say; we will protect the environment as required by law, they say; we will abide by the terms of the MIA, they say; just let us proceed with our "project development work" and we promise not to proceed further unless all is well for everyone, they

say. But that once again begs the question: just who are they, saying "we"?

The layers of that banana tree will be peeled back one by one, from Sarabhoomi to Agrico to Global to Phosphate Resource Partners to Freeport-McMoran Resource Partners to Freeport-McMoran, Inc.

And there will stand these very same men, swearing that there is no such thing as Freeport-McMoran and, as Garland Robinette told me, that they wouldn't even know where Sri Lanka is if they didn't look it up on a map.

How can you fine or sue a fictional character?

Not that it would matter to these people even if they did exist; they already earn so much every year that they could pay the stipulated fines or court settlements out of pocket without blinking an eye. Exactly what they have done in West Papua and Florida. And that is after all their worst case scenario.

As Mr. Seneviratne has clearly shown, Sri Lanka's worst case scenario is much worse indeed. The kind of thing only fools or rogues would support.

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