

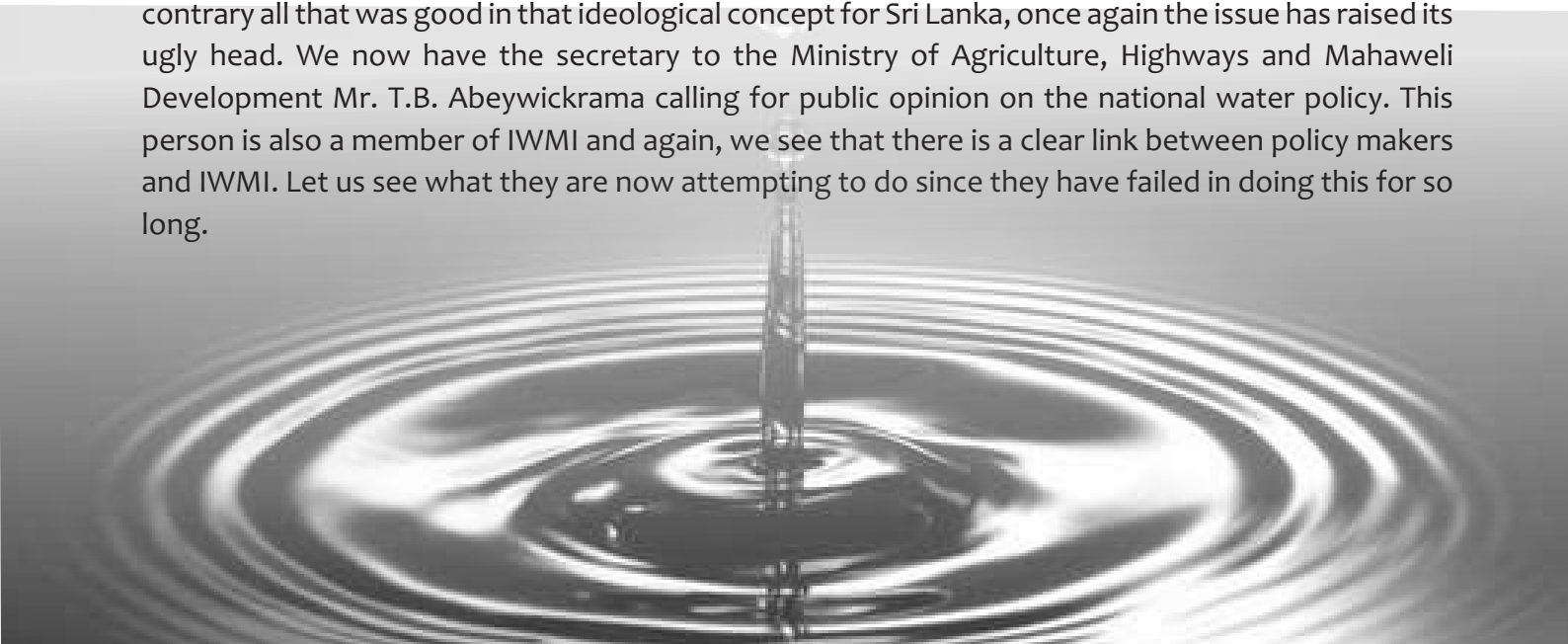
# Water is a right. not a commodity.

Let us think folks. What would we do if we were asked to pay for the air that we breathe? Regardless of who asks us to do that be it a government, a terrorist organization, a greedy multinational, a union of nations, however strong they are, however aggressive they are, however mobilized they are, however armed they are, we would rise up in protect and proceed to destroy them. Water is similar. It is part of our very life force. It is the inalienable right of every living creature of this plant. It is not a commodity. It is not a commercial or barter good. Any attempt to make it such would be met with the same counter-aggression that an attempt to sell air would. In other parts of the world, governments have fallen, powerful businesses have had to run with their collective tails between their legs and seriously embarrassed unions and consortiums of nations have had to look in the air and hum inanely.

In Sri Lanka, the attempt to sell to the people that which is theirs by right started in 1985 with the setting up IWMI (International Water Management Institute). Working in tandem with them, the FAO in 1998 formed a policy document covering water policy, the water act and sale of water.

Deep in the black hearts of corporatesville, IFIs and their "yes men" within the power structure of Sri Lanka was hatched a diabolical plot to disinherit a nation of its right to freely use its water. Just as the dark lords are ever plotting to disrupt the peace and happiness of the nation, those that promote it are ever vigilant and attuned to the machinations of greed. The water policy was first secretly set up by the Water Resources Council & Secretariat with the help of the International Water Management Institution (IWMI) in the year 2000. A copy of it was located by environmentalists and its contents were immediately made known to the people via the media. From the moment that the activity started, a large number of NGOs, trade unions and villages formed the "alliance for the protection of free water" and lobbied the government and those with vested interests by bombarding them with a battery of non-violent assaults. We stood firm. They did not have the courage to stand so they attempted to slip through our fingers. We caught them in our nets. They squirmed and struggled for a few years and then the tsunamis struck. While people were looking the other way they once again renewed their attempt to act like grease monkeys. We had no option but to hold those in check as well.

With the "Mahinda Chintanaya" came a promise that there will be no attempt to sell water. However, contrary all that was good in that ideological concept for Sri Lanka, once again the issue has raised its ugly head. We now have the secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Highways and Mahaweli Development Mr. T.B. Abeywickrama calling for public opinion on the national water policy. This person is also a member of IWMI and again, we see that there is a clear link between policy makers and IWMI. Let us see what they are now attempting to do since they have failed in doing this for so long.



Attempts are afoot to have a water pricing clause in all financial assistance provided. Funding is also made available to construct the infrastructure to price water. An example of this is the Mineral Water Control Rubber Dam project at Ambatale. Further, an organized plan is being set up to price water through water management institutes and farmer's organizations. Their manipulations are diabolical. For example, they state that paddy cultivation which is of utmost importance to ensure food security in our nation is a "water wasteful" crop and are seeking to supplant it with crops that are of no use to us but of high use to richer nations and relegate us to something close to a banana republic.

In perusing the draft document there is much talk of the rights of small, medium and large scale water users, the rights of traditional water users, the rights of the third water initiative etc. but at no point has there been a clear description of any of these thus preventing the general public from identifying exactly what their rights are under these varied guises. It is also clear from the document that there will be certain sections of the citizenry of the country who will have limited access to water and some which will have no access at all. Excuse us? No access to a fundamental right to a resource that is the very basis of life? What idiot amongst the policy makers is going to think that the nation is going to lie down and take that?

While there are plans to set up various institutes such as a national water management authority are to be set up and according to the document there will be a segmentation of the water resource and a mechanism setup to charge the citizens of the country for it. Further, the private sector is supposed to get involved in the management (and sale) of water and we see the same patterns that were attempted in places like Bolivia which resulted in a popular revolt that brought down the government.

The GMSL and its partner organizations have been vociferously lobbying the government for prevention of abuse of this resource, protecting clean water sources, development of the water resource by activities such as rebuilding the small tank system spread across the country. All our ideas for reducing waste and increasing the practical use and management of water through holistic mechanisms which do not violate the right to life and other fundamental rights of the people fell on deaf ears for the simple reason that profit is more important than the happiness of the citizenry.

We, supporting the idea of not selling water that the Mahinda Chintanaya clearly states believe that bureaucratic organs must surely be feeding ill-prepared or incomplete information to His Excellency the President. We sincerely believe that when the true picture is known to him, he will immediately rescind any vote he has given to the new water policy. Until that time, we have no choice but to do what we have always done – fight with every holistic weapon at our command for the right to life..



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