



# Illegal clearing of Udawattekele

by **Haris de Silva**

I was shocked to read the news item in your paper of the 3rd instant (3/6/2009) that the Governor of the Central Province (CP) had given permission to build houses for public servants in the reserved forest of Udawattekele in Kandy. But, immediately there after, on the 4th instant, another news item, also in The Island, said that the land was being cleared for the same purpose by the husband of a public official holding a high post. It further said that the clearing of the forest had been stopped with immediate effect by the Governor of the CP, who was earlier said to have given permission for that work. I believe that work has now been abandoned.

Udawattekele is a historic forest in Kandy. Nihal Karunaratna, a respected private medical practitioner, and a long time resident in Kandy, with an abiding interest in history, did years of research in his spare time, which would have been scrapped with difficulty, and authored an excellent book on Udawattekele. Titled, Udawattekele. The

Forbidden forest of the kings of Kandy, it was printed at the Government Press, and published by the National Archives, in 1988. Incidentally, it won international accolades for its print quality and the reproduction of photographs and plans, at a German Book Exhibition which was held shortly after its publication.

As Nihal Karunaratna (NK) had noted Udawattekele was a forest reserve of the kings of Kandy. Then called Tahansi kele or forbidden forest, commoners had no access to it. After the British took over the Kandyan Provinces in 1815, the forest came under its administration. They gave land from that extensive forest for various purposes. Some of the beneficiaries were a coffee planter, the Church Missionary Society, and those who sought to establish cemeteries. Trinity College stands on land granted to it, or rather to the Church from Udawattekele. There are also three temples, a Tapovanaya or a meditation centre on legally acquired land. In fact one temple had been there even before the British occupation of Kandy in 1815.

Just like the Bodhi Tree in Anuradhapura, which is the oldest historical tree in the world, Udawattekele is the only forest in Sri Lanka which has a historical record of its existence. It had been declared a Reserve Forest in 1856, the first forest to be so declared, and after several other proclamations it had also been declared a Sanctuary in 1983

I am also aware of the enormous energy spent by NK, and also as recorded in the publication, to organize various conservation projects to keep Udawattekele in its pristine glory. For instance Nihal had been the prime mover to get its lake de-silted by getting prisoners to do that work, and he had also organized 1000 school cadets to plant Cordia plants on the boundary of the Aruppola-Levella side.

What shocked me when I read the news items referred to earlier was that officer's

crass ignorance of the importance of Udawattekele, as a forest per se, and more as a historic forest. I do not know what office that 'high' official holds, but it is time that when officials are posted to 'high office' they be required to make themselves fully aware of the socio-cultural-historical importance/significance of the place/region they are posted to.

The good old British Civil Servants, complete outsiders to this country, are the only public officials, except for one local personnel in Batticaloa, who wrote Manuals, detailing every aspect of a province they were posted to serve in. The present officials may find it profitable to read those Manuals for their own information, so that they would not make blunders or injudicious and self-interested decisions as that 'high' official had done endangering a national asset/heritage.

It comes to my mind, that it may be a good idea to return to the old British practice of maintaining an official Diary by a Head of Department and a GA/DS so that the person concerned would be fully aware of what is happening in his department/district and as a contemporary record of administration. An attempt in that direction was made by the late Cyril Gamage when he was Secretary, Public Administration, but as it normally happens in this independent era, no follow-up or serious consideration is given to such ideas.

Re Udawattekele NK noted in 1988, "thieves, poachers, illicit timber fellers and encroachers still continue their depredations of the forest." I hope, that 'high' official would not want to be in any one of those categories. Eternal vigilance by the public interested in preserving our natural heritage has never been so important as of now, in a land of population explosion and limited utilizable land area. At least The Island is there to bring such depredations to the notice of the public.

by **Mahen.P.Siriwardena**

# Dengue: Biological control of mosquitoes

Control approaches like cleaning ones garden of dumps is a source reduction. They further say, that whilst the emphasis had been on the use of chemicals, the use of alternatives such as biological control agents, microbial agents in particular, and a revival of the concept of environmental management for mosquito control are most important. What is of immediate concern to us in Sri-Lanka are two kinds of mosquitoes.

Dengue fever is the hot topic of the day, and it would be of interest to many readers to follow the research findings of H.H.Yap and Hassan Ahamed both of Malaysia, who conducted extensive research in this field. In an overview they estimated that there are around 400 known species of mosquitoes found in Malaysia alone. They say that five common genera are Aedes, Anopheles, Armigueres, Culex and Mansonia. Besides being a general nuisance, they say, that it is common knowledge that mosquitoes are also vectors of human diseases. The four main being dengue/dengue haemorrhagic fever, Malaria, Filariasis and Japanese encephalitis which are transmitted by specific mosquitoes Aedes, Anopheles, Mansonia and Culex respectively.

In Sri Lanka what has historically been of great concern was the Anopheles causing Malaria which was epidemic in the late thirties and Filariasis in the coastal areas until the seventies. Whilst dengue has been around for many years it is currently prevalent an epidemic scale in almost all parts of the country

particularly in the western, Sabaragamuwa, and Central Provinces. They say the control of mosquitoes, either nuisance causing, or disease carrying, been attempted in various ways since ancient times with the objective of reducing man-mosquito contact and consequently human suffering and death.

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**Aedes Aegypti;**  
Distribution; - Cosmo tropical but originated from Africa.  
Disease transmission;- Dengue\ dengue hemorrhagic fevers-broader Southeast Asia Yellow Fever-Tropical Africa & America  
Biology- Habitat- container breeder especially man-made containers with clean water in urban/Suburban areas.  
Biting rhythm'- Biting peaks at change of light. (After sunrise and before Sunset)  
Colour preferences;- darker colours of black and red.  
Flight distance- short (50-100 m).  
**Aedes albopictus**  
Endemic in tropical and subtropical Asia, central and South America and Tropical Islands.  
Disease Transmission'- Dengue Fever- broader south East Asia, tropical America and Islands.  
Habitat- container breeder includes natural and artificial containers in urban/ rural areas.  
Biting Rhythm'- Biting at change of light inten-

sity (bite throughout the daytime with a major peak before sunset).  
Colour preferences'- prefers darker colours of black and red.  
Flight distance- short- 50- 100 m).  
Which of the above is active is unknown by the writer.  
A countrywide campaign to clean up gardens and destroy garbage is in full swing with dire consequences to those who disregard the order. It should be done not only as a contingency measure but on a regular basis in households. However, the blame must rest with provincial administrators and

local bodies for not inviting world tenders to use appropriate technology that eliminates all waste, including hospital and industrial, to generate electricity.

Both species of Aedes habitually breed in containers, containing fresh water.

This means that they breed inside one's own home. They could be in your flower vase. Blaming neighbours may not be enough. This is all the more prevalent in schools, hospitals, public places and road sides in the Colombo city. There may be millions of un-noticed breeding places in and around the city. In so far as it impractical to locate all breeding places, a task force must be set up to seek both local and foreign expertise to have a long term solution. Biological control should be considered as a viable long term option to eradicate the dengue menace, once and for all.

(The writer is the former Project Manager for the 1st mosquito coil Manufacturing plant in Sri-Lanka).