

Minister insists on installing Rain Water Harvesting System

by Cyril Wimalasurendre, Kandy Corr.

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Stressing the need to utilise rain water in the wake of a shortage of water in the next few decades, Urban Development and Water Supply Minister Dinesh Gunawardene said that regulations should be enforced compelling builders to install Rain Water Harvesting Systems in the future.

Gunawardene was addressing the International Workshop on Rain Water Harvesting which commenced at Mahaveli Reach Hotel, Kandy, on Wednesday.

Representatives of many countries including SAARC countries, experts and observers were attending the workshop which will continue for four days.

The participants were discussing a common problem of the region where many countries fall within the category of developing countries and who are expected to give serious thought to the scarcity of water that will affect them in the next few decades Gunawardena stressed.

Water was considered a plentiful resource in most areas until recently, but with the increase of population, urbanisation and modernisation the requirement has increased considerably, he said

Accelerating this situation is the climate change which has resulted in a decrease in average rainfall in many countries including Sri Lanka and according to meteorological data the annual rainfall in the Walawa basin has decreased from 2000mm in 1901 to around 1800mm in the year 2000, the minister said.

He said that in many parts of the world including Sri Lanka, deforestation and soil degradation have also caused water shortages, which caused considerable problems for the people inhabiting these areas. In Ethiopia, large tracks of land have become deserts where neither plants nor animal life can thrive.

According to the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) nearly 1.4 billion people will experience severe water scarcity within the next few decades. The world is running out of water and the demand far exceeds its availability. 90 million of people are under-going hardship. Being a worldwide problem, world-wide cooperation is required to solve it. It has become necessary for all of us to get together and exchange experiences on a potential solution.

The minister said that Rain Water is not merely water; it is water with energy, availability and quality. It has high potential energy, meaning that it can be trapped at any height without needing large power sources to pump it elsewhere; it is available in large quantities; and it is sufficiently pure that high-cost purification plant may be eliminated.

In Sri Lanka, economy and society have been dependent on water from time immemorial. Our culture was built upon a hydraulic civilisation.

There is a saying Among Buddhists,

"Devo Vassatukalena

sassasampattihetu ca

phito bhavatu loko ca

raja bhavatu dhammiko".

"May rain fall at suitable times.

May the world progress

and be happy and peaceful.

May the king be righteous".

Timely rain is associated with social contentment and with reasonable leaders of society who practise good governance. The dry zone is studded with thousands of ancient tanks of varying capacities. King Mahasena was instrumental in constructing the first giant reservoir, the Minneriya reservoir which covered nearly 1,900 hectares. Other large tanks such as Prakrama Samudraya, Mahakandarawa tank and Kalawewa were constructed to collect rainwater for crop and animal production and various domestic uses. The storage reservoirs, swimming pools and fountains of the 5th century rock fortress of Sigiriya were dependent on harvested rainwater.

Rain water is the main source of water in Sri Lanka. The rain in Sri Lanka is bi-monsoonal and the annual average rainfall of around 1700mm is considered high when compared with many other countries. In the wet zone, which covers a quarter of the country, the average annual rainfall is around 2400mm, while in the dry zone, it is around 1450mm – which is still higher than in many countries.

Some parts of the arid zone of this country, such as Hambantota District, receive only about 1000mm of rain annually – in only 2-3 months of the year, the other months being rain-less. In some parts of Sri Lanka, the available water cannot be used for drinking because it has high fluoride or salt content. Thus, water tends to be scarce in many areas of the country.

Population growth and better infrastructure facilities have resulted in people migrating to towns. The population density in urban areas is much higher than the average for the country and it has increased considerably during the last two decades. For example, in 2001, the population density in Colombo District was 3,305 persons per square kilometre – three times that in 1963 – the average for the country being 300.

Secretary Ministry of Urban Development and Water Supply A. N. R. Amaratunge, Minister for Agriculture, Government of Bhutan Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup, Minister for Water Resources Government of India Prof. Salf-Ud-Din Soz, Deputy Minister for Environment Energy and Power, Government of Maldives Abdul Razzak Idris, Minister for Physical Planning and Works, Government of Nepal Gopal Man Shrestha and Prof. J. B. Dissanayake addressed the inaugural sessions.