

**M**uthurajawela, a fertile paddy land in the past was made a protected wetland sanctuary under the flora and Fauna protection act by a gazette notification dated October 31, 1996. This was done in recognition of its vast biodiversity.

The internationally acclaimed wetland, located between Colombo and Negombo, is being undermined by unauthorized and illegal human activities. These activities are taking place despite the sanctuary boasting of environmental, economic and regenerative values. According to records at the Agrarian Development Department office, there are 635 acres of paddy fields in the Muthurajawela area. Marshland and mangroves in the area amount to 7000 acres. 'society of Protecting Muthurajawela sanctuary', a leading and active environmental society in the areas surrounding Muthurajawela, is keeping a close watch on what is happening in Muthurajawela.

The destruction taking place within the sanctuary was brought to light by a small group of committed residents. They formed the Organization for the protection of Muthurajawela in a bid to expose the racket that was being carried out under the guise of a development project. Anil lankapura jayamaha who heads the organization said the sanctuary was the lifeline of people in the area and its destruction would lead to serious environmental problems. "We took on the task of exposing the unscrupulous officials,



politicians and businessman involved in the destruction of Muthurajawela.

This had led to threats to our lives and our families, but once we committed ourselves to the task, we did not stop till we brought it to the attention of the president," he said.

The leaders of this society alleged that the Agrarian Development Department has received a massive amount of money from a private developer to fill close to 406 acres of follow fields and start a housing project in the Muthurajawela sanctuary. The land is in Thuduwa Bopitiya and Kunjawaththa of Wattala Divisional secretariat area. This massive sum of money was to be paid in



connection with a land area spreading to 65102 perches with each perch valued at 500 rupees. The society leaders said that they had got to know of this deal and prevented the department from continuing with it.

**W**e as the Holy Family sisters we have incarnated with the beautiful ambient of Bopitiya and more deeply we have rooted and identified ourselves in the hearts of the people of this soil.



In April, 2017 suddenly got the news; from Colombo that the municipal council had decide to dump the garbage to the Muthurajawela. Muthurajawela is a marshy land for so many water creatures. This marshy land contributes a lot for the eco balancing. Thus any sort of disturbance to this land could collapse all the eco-Biological system.

When this shocking news reached our ears, we all gathered to the church to discuss how we could overcome this predicament.

We all went to the place where the garbage dumping process had been initiated. We block the road and many people gathered with us irrespective of their religious differences to stop this threat.

So we began the protest against the dumping. First we did the active protest to stop the dumping, but they were continuing dumping. Then we began the silent protest with the prayers. After three days they stop the dumping. Later all the educated people in the village gathered to take decisions to protect Muthurajawela. They decided to file the case against the filling of the Muthurajawela. As



sisters we too went to courts for every time . it was an advantage the hearing was postpond.

Then our core group met Maithreepala Sirisena [former President] Then he stop all the filling inside of this land. But everything had happen secretly. They have prepare secret passage to enter the land for filling. When the new environment minister appointed we took chance to meet him and discussed about this issue. He promised to visit this area. He came and visited this area and get a broader understanding about this issue.

Very Recently our cardinal and the bishops paid their attention to this problem and took some measures to stop this destruction. They had press conferences. Bishop J.D Anthony visited around parishes and created awareness among the people about this problem. The printed poster and banner to paste

everywhere to protect this marshy land. With all this actions Bopitiya parish took more initiative to do so many activities such as awareness programs , meeting people and organizing

vehicle parade to create awareness among people and to stop this destruction.

Muthurajawela is a paradise and a treasure of the people. We all should join our hands to stop this fillings and the destroying of this sanctuary.

