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TITLE	The Sunday Times	DATE	15/08/99	PAGE	03	KEY WORDS
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Eppawela: secret signing in Canada

By Dilrukshi Handunnetti

The Memorandum of Understanding on the explosive Eppawala phosphate mining project is reported to have been secretly signed in Canada, provoking a fresh outburst by environmental protest groups.

Informed sources told The Sunday Times the contract had been secretly finalised between the Board of Investment (BOI) and the Freeport MacMoran Company which has been widely criticised for disregarding environmental and human rights in its projects.

According to these sources, the MOU signifies the finalisation of the contract which has been strongly opposed by villagers of the area backed by environmental and civic action groups. The protesters say the mining project would leave behind only a massive hole in Eppawala while depriving Sri Lanka of a rich though unrenewable mineral and draining millions of rupees to the United States.

Meanwhile, angry residents of some 25 villages in and around Eppawala are planning to storm out again on August 27 in a massive protest against the mining project involving a discred-

ited multinational company.

Ven. Mahamankadawila Piyaratana Nayaka Thera, President of the Committee to Protect Eppawala Phosphate Mines, has accused the government of playing a double game with the nation's resources. He said that at the recent provincial election campaign PA leaders had claimed the project was cancelled but officials had secretly gone ahead with it.

The Prelate said thousands of people were expected to join the August 27 protest along with civic action groups but they were not inviting politicians who generally had bogus tears for the people.