

U-turns on N'cholai

29/05/02 Island
I refer to Mr. Carlo Fernando's article of 02/05/02 and as one who handled the subject of coal power while in service at the Ministry of Power and Energy, I would wish to comment on two statements made therein. I must give full credit to Mr. Carlo Fernando (CF) as he is the "Father of Coal Power Generation" in this country. I was associated with the project from the first Australian team that came to Sri Lanka to do a survey to which CF was chosen to accompany the team. Their report indicated that Trinco was the most suitable and ideal site. Unfortunately, due to the escalation of terrorist activities, this site was abandoned after some studies done by foreign consultants. Then the situation arose for the CEB to look for a site along the Western coast. Here again, CF being very enthusiastic accompanied the Japan Consulting Institute (JCI) team and they selected (including CF) four (4) sites from Puttalam to Marawila - one of which was Norochcholai.

Here I must mention, if I remember it right,

the original site selected by the JCI as well as CF, was a site 3-km from St. Anne's shrine towards south. CEB considering the proximity to the shrine was considerate to shift the site further south by another 10 km. Dunugalpitiya, as far as I can recollect, was considered too close to Negombo and work involved filling up of the lagoon.

In the opening paragraph of CF's article, he says, "The cancellation is in no way related to environmental objections or religion". I hope CF has closely followed newspaper reports - where the Bishop of Chilaw came to the scene raising objections - security, environment and last of all engineering, which were thoroughly gone into by all experts and finally by the consultants appointed with the consent and approval of the Bishop of Chilaw who in no uncertain terms cleared the site as suitable. Now the Bishop clings to the last straw, the "promise" given by political leaders.

In the now famous Ramboll report, it was stated that the consultants had interviewed

those who were critical of the project and I hope CF too may have made submissions on either environment security or engineering aspects to these consultants. If he did not, it may be that he was frightened to face a superior, knowledgeable body. It is also reported that the Bishop chaired 25 meetings in Colombo at "Cicada".

In my opinion, the controversy over Norochcholai is Mr. CF's creation. Would he have preferred the original site which was 3 km close to St. Anne's Shrine, for the selection of which he himself was responsible? One surprising omission is why CF did not take JIC team to Mawella, where he wants to have the power plant at present? Was it because the late president R. Premadasa was a tough customer? Had he been alive today, I believe, Norochcholai would have been commissioned and the ongoing power crisis averted.

I am subject to correction.

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