

Coal power vs liquefied natural gas

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Island

I thank Dr. Janaka Ratnasiri of Climate Action Lanka (*The Island*, May 22) for his response to certain queries I raised about the comparative economies of electricity generation from coal and LNG.

The technology to use both types of fuel is well established. However unpleasant it is, we cannot avoid a detailed calculation of costs, because that is what matters. Irrespective of what electricity planners and climate activists say, people in Sri Lanka want electricity at the lowest possible cost. Of course, they will insist on full environmental-compliance, whether it is coal or LNG. If our Regulatory Agencies are weak in enforcing the Environment Act and safety standards, that would apply to both types of power plants.

Dr. Ratnasiri explained the case of Japan, where they have over 80,000 Megawatts of coal and over 20,000 Megawatts of LNG power plant. Both fuels are

imported to Japan.

For a start, it would be nice if Dr. Ratnasiri would explain his implied position that Sri Lanka can expect to buy LNG at the same price as Japan, for quantities as small as 2.5 per cent (in year 2005) and 10 per cent (in year 2030) of what Japan imports. It would also be useful to discuss why Japan continues to build today, both coal power plants and LNG power plants, and in any given year, why the actual annual capacity factor of Japan's fleet of LNG plants is lower than that of their fleet of coal power plants.

If LNG is so cost competitive compared with coal, and if coal is so damaging to the environment as Dr. Ratnasiri says, I would have expected Japan to run their LNG power plants at the highest possible capacity factor, and limit the operation of their coal plants to the minimum.

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