

Norochcholai, the bishop and electricity prices

This refers to the above titled article published in an English daily of November 19, by Eng J. Varnakulasingha. (JV)

He is very critical of Dr. Tilak Siyambalapi-tiya for his article of November 1, 2005 for blaming the Bishop of Chillaw for the loss of over Rs 200 billion to the country. However I am critical of showing the correct amount of loss caused to the country by the Bishop of Chillaw which will be over Rs 400 billion as indicated in a letter by me to the editor published on March 20, 2005 of the Daily Mirror.

We Catholics are trained to act according to our conscience and to give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to give unto God what belongs to God, and this is what was done by a large number of Catholics at the just concluded elections when our spiritual leaders attempted to direct the Catholics in matters that are not spiritual. So will it be with the Bishop of Chillaw.

JV states that in 1980 plans were changed to have a coal power station only in 2007. However he does not state that in 1991 plans were there for having a coal power stations before the end of the century and that when for the first time preliminary investigations were started at Mawella the late president Premadasa banned coal power stations and it was only after his death that the CEB started investigations for coal power stations.

Norochcholai was selected and the self loan for it was obtained by the then UNP government just before it went out of office in 1994 and if the Bishop of Chillaw did not object, the Norochcholai project would have been commissioned before the end of the century.

JV does not also state the reason why the CEB engineers in 1980 wanted a coal power plant in

2007. This is because the oil refinery had difficulties in the disposal of heavy oil. But this situation changed by the late eighties and as such coal power was planned by CEB engineers for commissioning before the year 2000.

JV was a director of CEB by a political appointment and the country knows how these political appointments are made and he does not appear to even know that according to the CEB act, the CEB is the only legal authority to decide on the location of power stations etc. and not the Bishop of Chillaw nor the president nor leaders of political parties.

To quote the Act.

"An act to provide for an establishment of an electricity board for the development and coordination of the generation supply and distribution of electrical energy".

He may be knowing that this controversial act was enacted by the then UNP government and was amended under candle light with all CEB unions striking.

However if any person thinks that the location of the site for Norochcholai has been done in an arbitrary manner by the CEB, then they should have taken it to courts and obtained a court order instead of illegally cancelling such a viable project which will cost a loss of over Rs400 billion due to the delay. This had happened in the Eppawala Phosphate project when the legal authority acted in an arbitrary manner the protestors obtained a court order and the project was stopped.

However in the Norochcholai project not only the legal authority the CEB was for the project but also the following were supporting the project which had cleared the important legal obstacle such as environment impact assess-

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Site demarcated for the coal power plant in Norochcholai

ment which took over two years.

(1) The 1st foreign consultant

(2) The 2nd foreign consultant

(3) The institution of Engineers Sri Lanka

(4) Up to April 29, 2000 the president of the Democratic republic of Sri Lanka by the presidential Secretariat issuing a circular titled analyses heading coal fired power plants sub headings

(1) Why do we need coal fired power plant?

(2) How will Sri Lanka benefit from the new plants?

(3) How will the ecologic impact be minimised.

This particularly referred to Norochcholai project and also supporting the 4.2 km long jetty which was modified by the 2nd consultant, the CEB agreeing to the increase cost of 10cts per unit to give an escape route, for the Bishop of Chillaw.

(This is available on website www.priu.gov.lk)

However JV states this project was cancelled by the cabinet of ministers in 2000. The question is how legal was the cancellation. However as far as we know the 60 billion rupees soft loan by the Japanese government for the Norochcholai project was returned

during the period of the UNP government when Karu Jayasuriya was the minister of power.

However coming to the questions of pollution Engineers who have been operating steam power plants whether coal or oil fired will know that there is hardly any difference regarding pollution whether it is a modern coal or oil fired power plant because traces of sulphur trioxide has to be let out to the atmosphere. It can be removed only by reducing the flue gas temperature below 360F then the pre heater will not last for more than 6 months as such the flue gas temperature are always maintained about 4000F sending out traces of SO3 to the atmosphere.

There is also another fear spread about coal plants that this is a new technology to Sri Lanka and that it should be done by foreigners.

This is a myth there is hardly any difference between a coal fired and a oil fired power plants. In coal power, the coal is pulverized and under pressure sent to the burners in oil. The oil is preheated under pressure and is sent to the burner.

The 1st batch of five engineers trained for the operation and maintenance

of the Kelanitissa oil-fired-power-station was trained is a coal-fired-power-station at Basin Bridge Madras and I was one of the five Engineers.

Most probably JV had written the article hoping for a UNP victory where such enormous profit making concerns were to be handed over to foreigners. Just calculate and see the enormous profit that can be made on a 900MW coal fired power plant. Such a plant will produce about 7 billion units per year at 90% plant factor if a mark up of 50cts per unit is made it will give a clear profit of 3.5 billion rupees per year.

By 2013 it is estimated that the thermal power requirement will be about 14 billion units per year increasing every year by more than 14 x 0.08 = 1.1 billion units as such another coal power station is required to take over the balance 7 billion units of very expensive oil powered units and as such reduce the loss due to the delay of the Norochcholai power project to 200 billion rupees.

With such amount of coal power available cooking could be done by electricity at about 50% less than by gas and rail ways could be electrified bringing down the cost

of transport. It is hoped the above will catch the eye of Mr. Ajit Cabral the Economic Adviser to the President who would see the enormous benefit of coal power for the economic well being of our country. JV states about transportation of coal from Trincomalee to Chillaw. He may be talking about the 10MW coal plant owned and operated by the Puttalam cement factory without any opposition by the Bishop of Chillaw.

However it should be noted though the Bishop of Chillaw is the cause for the delay he is not responsible for the delay because the responsibility for the delay are the two leaders of the UNP and SLFP who due to the fear of losing a few votes abandoned such a viable project causing such a enormous loss of Rs. 400 billion to the country.

However what all of us the hard pressed electricity consumers and the trade union of the CEB should do is to say on behalf of our political spineless leaders *mea culpa mea culpa mea maxima culpa* and admit their guilt for the delay and demand that not only Norochcholai but also another coal power station should commence construction immediately.

Also let there be no room for the following saying to apply, "Fools rush in where Angels fear to tread".

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