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D. News

Validity of sites for coal power

by E. Carlo Fernando

This article is in the context of the two opposing statements made in the news media by the IESL to report on the planned coal power generation.

I was the CEB's Power Development Consultant who initiated these studies in 1978 and have since then, been actively following the development of this project. I still find that the authorities are being misled by highly placed individuals.

Mawella is the best site for the coal power project in the present context. But these officials never speak about it. By ignoring knowledgeable advice Rs. 500 million and 7 years have already been wasted on Norachcholai.

It was a dirty game played by anti-coal elements against the Japanese favoured site Dungalpitiya/Negombo that got the project shifted to Norachcholai the worst site in the Japanese study. The false propaganda carried out against the Negombo site is that the Negombo lagoon has to be filled while only 1% of the lagoon has to be filled; the coal unloading jetty is 4.5 km long when it is only 3/4 km; the Negombo population has to be evacuated whereas in actual

fact Dungalpitiya is outside Negombo Municipal limits and is situated 8 km away from the town; also not more than 50 to 100 small huts will have to be relocated. The Japanese study report dealt at length only on the Negombo site with layout plans drawn. The others - Marawila, Kalpitiya/Putalam are only identified sites. The construction schedule was to get the Negombo plant commissioned in 1999 with Japanese funding. The diesel lobby did not like this at all.

One cannot believe that the IESL Statement reflects the opinion of its 7000 members. It more likely is based on the plans put forward by the diesel lobby. It is incredible to think that this Premier Engineering Institute can swallow the evil propaganda guided by the diesel lobby and Electro Watt, in order to run down the excellent site at Mawella for the coal power project.

Coal shipments

When planning for coal power generation with imported coal the most important consideration is to provide for steady reliable coal shipments. Coal loading at exporting point and coal unloading at the receiving point involve widely different technologies. The latter

is a difficult more expensive process if not properly planned.

At Norachcholai the Electro Watt Study provided for a jetty over 4 km long in the open sea for unloading coal. After pointing out the defects in that proposal the jetty was given up. Now a coal transfer from large coal ships to barges in mid sea has been proposed. The IESL statement supports this arrangement.

In supporting it the IESL has presented some cases of ship to barge coal transfers. For example it mentions that such transfers are taking place in Colombia and Venezuela in South America. These two countries have coal mines and coal is expected. One cannot understand why when exporting coal is transferred from large ships to barges. In any case such transfers must be taking place in enclosed bays, or protected harbours and are not practised in open seas.

Also regarding these ship to barge transfers Amsterdam and Rotterdam in the Netherlands have been spoken of. These are large harbours there. So these transfers are taking place in these protected harbours. For coal transfers in enclosed harbours floating cranes may be used. If coal is transported from close by sources

like Poland, Germany self unloaders fitted in coal ships can be used.

At Hazira Port Mumbai (Bombay) iron ore and coal are said to be discharged from ship to barges by means of floating cranes. That is within the Port. A similar arrangement is taking place in Goa in India. Goa is in an enclosed bay. According to Master Mariner Capt. O. L. Samaranyake, an expert in this field with long experience internationally and all around Sri Lanka, there had even been problems due to rough weather when the ship started rolling with the barge tied alongside, the barge damaging the ship's side and the cranes finding it difficult to operate in that condition. So to do that in an open roadstead (open sea-way) as envisaged at Norachcholai is quite unthinkable.

In my studies I have found in Sri Lanka this ship to barge arrangement can be practised in Trincomalee. Here there is a possibility of having coal power plants in the Tampalagam Bay.

In such a case coal from a distant source like Australia can be off loaded from coal carriers into barges by means of floating cranes in the Trincomalee enclosed harbour and then these barges could deliver coal to

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power plants in the Tampalagam Bay.

At Mawella a 65,000 dwt coal ship can be anchored just by the shore and the coal can be unloaded without resorting to cumbersome ship to barge arrangements. Mawella is a great natural resource Sri Lanka is blessed with. We should thankfully accept and utilise it without shunning it, as is happening now.

The promoters of Norachcholai argue that as Rs. 500 million and 7 years have been already spent on this project it should be taken up immediately. Having blundered can we justify wasting another Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 40,000 million on a futile project of no return which will only prove to be a calamitous liability.

This massive power plant which is to be the major power source required for the real industrialisation of Sri Lanka, should not be dealt with based on false engineering concepts, as is taking place now - See *The Island* "Going Ahead with Coal Power project may spell doom for country." (Norachcholai) 20.06.02 and the IESL says 21.06.02. See also *Daily News* "Coal Shipments to Norachcholai and the

Scrapped Urea Plant" 29 May 02.

Now the latest decision of the Cabinet on 9 July 2002 is to set up the first coal power plant at Trincomalee. It is good news to hear that Norachcholai has been cancelled thereby saving the country from a severe catastrophe. What a great relief! But this is not the end of the story. The power system needs more than one coal power plant of 300 MW each to start with. So simultaneously it would be prudent to also take up Mawella in the South.

In the case of the Mahaweli Scheme, Polgolla, Bowatenna, Victoria, Rantambe, Randenigale, Kotmale were all constructed in parallel. So act like J. R. and on a Government to Government agreement, say with Japan and U.K. get a coal power plant at Mawella constructed at a record speed in 3 years, while the private sector can take up Trincomalee. It would be inadvisable and rather foolish to initially install 900 MW in one place. Why not be prudent and observe the old dictum, 'Do not put all your eggs in one basket.'

(The writer is a former Power Development Consultant-CEB)

Coal power could be a distant dream says energy expert

By Munza Mushtaq

"Despite the government's decision to establish a coal power plant in Trincomalee, it could be a distant dream due to the huge investment needed for the establishment.

Millions of US dollars is needed for the establishment of the initial 300 MW power plant," senior engineers of the Ceylon Electricity Board

and energy expert Dr. Tilak Siyambalapitiya told the *Daily Mirror*.

"One must take into account as to what sort of private investor or even a friendly government would be willing to invest so many millions for such a project and that too in Trincomalee.

Even if the necessary investment is found for the project, the price of a unit of

power produced from the coal power plant would be high, as the necessary investment for the establishment of the coal fired plant is very high. Coal is one of the cheapest means of electricity," the engineers said.

The engineers further added that the present site found by the government is very good when considering the delivery of coal to

the power plant and the availability of space. However, he added it was a totally different ball game when it comes to the part of investment.

The country would need as much as three coal fired power plants of 900 MW capacity each within the next twenty years.

For the Trincomalee site a feasibility study was con-

ducted between 1985-1987. However as there was no environment act at that time no Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) was held. This should be conducted now and the earlier feasibility study would also have to be updated, the engineers said.

Due to the non-establishment of the coal power plant, the country is losing approxi-

mately Rs. 44.8 million per day, while the total loss of economy due to the non implementation of the project has exceeded Rs. 45,000 million.

Meanwhile the engineers alleged the main reason for the government to change to Trincomalee from Norochcholai was due to the pressure from the Bishop of Chilaw. - (MM)