

27/07/02 Island

Coal power and wastage of public funds

There is no one in Sri Lanka, who will not welcome cheap electric power. It is a fact that hydropower the cheapest natural resource available, is subject to the vagaries of weather. Nevertheless this had been the mainstay of power generation in this country until recently. Now it is increasingly problematic - especially in the hill country, due to political pandrums, coupled with governmental pusillanimity.

The next alternative is coal but this has also given rise to controversies. The people thus continue to bear economic burdens and strains.

Both the present and the past governments are guilty of their duplicity for the abandonment of Norochcholai Project for which feasibility studies were conducted and donor funding arranged.

It is indeed a tragedy that various groups of people claiming to represent or commit people's rights, commit dastardly acts like LTTE which destroyed the fuel tanks at Kolonnawa and destroyed planes at Katunayake. The JVP committed similar economic destruction. They still continue by fermenting wildcat strikes causing the closure or partial paralysis of industries, they continue to disrupt the universities, once the seats of learning, now turning out to be factories for generating unemployable half baked rebels, serving the JVP cause well. The cost to the educational structure, the denial of the right to education for the undergraduates in general is immeasurable.

The leaders of the PA also have indulged in wastage. The recent revelations of the controversial purchase of vehicles, the immense outstanding payment for an ego-boosting BBC interview, the printing of a massive quantity of

propaganda material under the guise of students text, are just a few of them. The present government is no better. The appointment of a jumbo-sized cabinet (possibly in keeping with their party symbol) is already leading to inter Ministerial conflicts. The tours of Ministers with their retinues abroad, etc. place severe burdens on people.

The present government as a compromise has now decided to install a coal-power generating complex at Trincomalee. This gives rise to many issues which the Minister of Power and Energy will have to resolve.

Firstly, the people will certainly want to know whether the environmental and technical problems that were cited against the Norochcholai Project have been successfully solved by shifting the project to Trincomalee. Assuming that these have been achieved some other matters that merits ministerial consideration are:—

1. Norochcholai is a sparsely populated area and hence any deleterious effects of a coal project on human life and habitation would have been minimal, whereas Trincomalee is a densely populated area.

2. The disposal of coal dust in a location as Trincomalee vis a vis its relationship to the NE monsoonal activity.

3. The effects of cyclonic activity in the east coast in relation to a coal project and the comparison of the location with Norochcholai.

4. Economic and social benefits of Norochcholai a state project against Trincomalee as a private venture and the regulatory safeguards.

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