

Norochcholai coal power — question of security

12/07/00 Island.

Since of late, several letters have appeared in the newspapers about the Bishop's protests against setting up a coal power plant at Norochcholai. They are all of the view that coal power is absolutely essential to provide a reliable cheap power supply. But none of them raises the great security threat at Norochcholai. This is such an important issue that even the most excellent Trincomalee site for this project had to be set aside because of the danger posed by terrorism. Mind you, this was after all the plans and other documents were prepared.

To a question asked by a writer "Is Norochcholai now safe?" Dr. Tilak Siyambalapitiya's reply is that even in the relatively trouble free countries like the UK and USA, power plants are heavily protected and the plant designers would have taken the necessary precautions against any security threats. (The Island April 5.)

Here you see how illogical our planners' concepts of security are. When in relatively trouble-free countries power plants are heavily protected, how much more must a poor country like Sri Lanka infested with suicide bombers' safeguard its power stations. Here, we are faced with fanatical suicide bombers to an extent not found in any other country. Planners should realise the consequences which will be caused by a disruption of the power supply from such a big power plant. The best protection in our case is not to provide for such hazardous situations. Sri Lanka can never afford to take a risk setting up such a large power plant and then have it bomb blasted.

The Bishop's objection is that this Jetty will obstruct the free movement of fishing boats. To this, the CEB says that the boats will be allowed to pass through the Jetty freely. Then what will prevent a fishing boat loaded with bombs banging into the Jetty by a suicide bomber? Who can prevent this? Is it the plan to check all the fishing boats passing through the jetty day and night all throughout the year for the next 20-30 years as long as terrorism lasts.

On this subject of Norochcholai Coal Power

there was a discussion on TNL TV on April 28. Here, the Bishop of Chilaw strongly raised this security issue. The Chairman CEB said that this matter has been looked into carefully, and adequate security will be provided. Then the Bishop asked the Chairman to say what the perimeters of the security zone would be to protect the 4 KM long jetty.

The Chairman failed to reply to that question. The Bishop demanded a reply from him - but no reply was forthcoming. The Deputy Minister of Defence before the fall of Elephant Pass announced in Parliament with certainty that the Tigers would not be able to take Elephant Pass for sure. Are the CEB authorities aware of the fall of the Elephant Pass and how speedily it was achieved?

This 4 KM long jetty protruding into the Kalpitiya sea is the life line of the power plant. You see today to capture Jaffna, the terrorists did not attack the heavily fortified Elephant Pass. They attacked the main supply route A9 connecting Elephant Pass with Jaffna and then occupied 4 KM of it. It posed a very serious threat to the whole military operation in the North.

However, the government managed to recapture this at great loss in men and material, but it had to remain non-operative. Then the water supply was cut off by capturing the wells. This led to the fall of Elephant Pass. In the case of Norochcholai, it will not be a case of recapturing, rather - it will be reconstruction of the jetty.

The CEB says if the jetty is blasted it will be repaired. How many years will the repair take? After repairs, it can again be easily blasted because the free movement of boats is allowed through the jetty. Let the CEB realise that the jetty is not like its transformers which are often blasted, but are replaced in a few days. The jetty is a relatively huge, structure constructed in the sea. When the jetty is blasted the power station will cease to function.

The Central Bank was bombed in January 1996. Still repairs are not complete and the

road in front of the bank remains closed for normal traffic. Repairs to the CEB's Orugodawatta bombed oil tanks took about 4 years. Remember it is from the countries of the foreign advisers of our strategic projects that money and arms flow here to the LTTE to continue this deadly terrorists war.

Recently a Tamil Nadu political leader Gopalaswamy had stated at a gathering organised by the LTTE in Geneva, Switzerland, that the LTTE should continue in their attempt to assassinate President Chandrika Kumaratunga. Tamil Nadu is only a few miles away from Kalpitiya. Thus in locating this large power plant should not the authorities seriously take into account such anti Sri Lankan sentiments and foreign conspiracies?

"See the prominent news item 'Now Tigers move into Switzerland' in the *Sunday Times* April 30, 2000 page 2. It says "LTTE had one of its main offices in Switzerland and openly canvassed or extorted money from Sri Lanka. Asylum seekers here, collecting upto 2 million francs a month. These funds were being used to buy weapons and continue the conflict."

"As most of the European countries become parties to the UN Convention against Financing of Terrorism, the LTTE movement has begun to shift its activities to Switzerland."

"We are concerned that Switzerland is becoming a 'Safe haven' for their terrorist activities through the large number of Tamil economic migrants."

The CEB claims that the consultants on this job say that Norochcholai is the best site for the project. These consultants are also from Switzerland.

In the newspapers senior experienced engineers have expressed their opinion that in the present confused state of affairs, the CEB should take up Mawella, excellent in all respects instead of Norochcholai, such a hazard security wise.

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