

Security for Norachcholai: Not to be ridiculed

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This is a reply to the statement on security made by Dr. Tilak Siyambalapitiya in his article "Norachcholai: Rs 20 million lost per day and many will regret." (*The Island* 21.7.2000) The statement: "Finally when they could not support any of their arguments with scientific reasoning and calculations, now they turned to the only weapon the timely use of the most powerful weapon which has no basis or sense; security, strong, enough to drive fear into any body's mind." - Strong words indeed.

Since 1994 when the project was shifted by fraudulent means, by the diesel lobby in the CEB, from the JCI recommended site in Negombo to Kalpitiya, the least favoured site in the JCI report, I have been objecting to Kalpitiya mainly on security grounds. So the security issue is by no means the timely use of the most powerful weapon which has no basis or sense. For the past 17 years, intellectuals and planners with short memories have been laughing and mocking at the need for security. Nevertheless the terrorists have successfully attacked and destroyed a great many economic targets at great loss to the country, and what about the many political leaders who did not observe basic precautions and were easily assassinated by these same terrorists.

When speaking about the security issue of the Norachcholai Coal power plant which the CEB strongly promotes for implementation what its planners say is wherever this project is sited, the security issue remains the same. When it is pointed out that Mawella is a safe site far superior to Norachcholai they reply that a power plant at Mawella can also face a terrorist attack in the same way the Dalada Maligawa at Kandy was attacked.

4 EM Jetty

I agree that a power plant at any site can be attacked and if proper security measures are taken it can be safe. But Norachcholai is a special case. Here the 4 KM long coal unloading jetty protruding into the Kalpitiya sea is extremely vulnerable to a suicide bombing attack. Is it the plan for all the fishing boats passing through the jetty to be checked day and night? Is it a practical proposition. One of them can be a potential threat. We have to be careful everytime and they have to be lucky only once.

Tamil Nadu is only a few kilometers away from here. The CEB planners would, be better informed if they keep in touch with Tamil Nadu politics. There is a free flow of boat activity between Tamil Nadu and here in spite of the presence of Sri Lankan and Indian naval vessels in the vicinity. Let the planners realise that this long 4 KM jetty protruding into the Kalpitiya sea can never be securely protected.

On the other hand, a short jetty at Mawella located alongside the shore can be protected like the power

plant. It will be a simple sturdy structure and pose no hazards. The principal task in a coal power plant based on imported coal is the safe efficient importation of coal. It is a massive task. In other countries for this task alone harbours are built at great cost.

Once the jetty is attacked and knocked down, the power plant will stand with a majestic look a symbol of CEB's monumental folly without coal. The coal stock pile will not help. Cutting off the power supply from this large power plant which will become the mayor power source supplying about 60 per cent of the system will be catastrophic. The CEB the provider of electricity should know better and visualise the likelihood of such disastrous consequences.

Norachcholai coal power will almost certainly be NO POWER, and the scarcity of power in the country is undoubtedly the most expensive. The objections to the project at Norachcholai both by the President and by the Leader of the Opposition should be indeed considered a blessing in disguise.

Mawella

How to overcome this crisis? Take up Mawella. An account of how to attend to Mawella is given in my article Coal power at Mawella and eco-terrorists' which appeared in the *Island* June 12, 2000.

There are many prominent politicians and religious leaders in the South. They should be contacted and be told about this scheme and how important the coal power plant is, if the nation and especially the south are to be developed and employment provided to the sons and daughters of the people there. Coal is a harmless source of power providing electricity all over the world. Norachcholai site has to be given up only due to security reasons and not on any other account.

Then those politicians and religious leaders who profess to love their country and lead the nation should get the people there to ask for the project to be set up at Mawella. The CEB need not go forward before the people in this attempt. It should remain in the background.

ECO terrorists

They should be told not to get fooled by foreign funded environmentalists - eco terrorists whose mission is to suppress meaningful development. No development means their sons and daughters will have to leave them, their motherland and seek menial and humiliating jobs in foreign lands. Because of no proper development in Ruhuna there are plenty of skilled Southerners working in the Western Province as carpenters, masons bakers etc. This is not a trend that should be allowed to continue. So it is imperative that the development of the South should be speedily taken up, starting with Mawella.

President to act

The President should be told the true facts about Mawella. Then the President could request the Japanese government to set up the project at Mawella on a government to government agreement. The CEB

says that the Japanese government has agreed to fund the coal power project with \$ 600 million. They should be told the change of site has become necessary because likely terrorist attacks are a threat to the security of the power plant at Norachcholai.

When the Philippines was faced with a similar power crisis President Ramos signed the Electric Power Crisis Act of 1993, which gave him special powers to address the country's crippling power crisis and got a 700 MW coal power plant executed and commissioned in 1995 - a short period of three years.

This took place seven years ago. Now the construction industry is more advanced. It is amazing to see the speed at which tall storeyed buildings are constructed. Earlier such buildings took much longer to put up.

It is the responsibility of the CEB to tell the President the true facts so that she could act in this crisis situation without delay. Mind you only if the request goes from the Sri Lankan President explaining the crisis situation the Japanese government will act fast. A move free from corruption.

There is a news report to say that the Japanese Government expects to be officially informed about the cancellation of the project at Norachcholai, so that the committed funds for the project can be withdrawn. It is now the duty of the CEB to advise the President to inform the Japanese that Norachcholai had to be given up due to security reasons, and now they could divert these committed funds to Mawella.

It is considered this is the only option available to us if a speedy implementation of a reliable power source is to be accomplished. If prompt action is taken now as pointed out here there will not be a power crisis in 2004. Otherwise with power cuts, the economy and the war effort will surely be jeopardised. Black outs will provide a free run for the terrorists and the underworld.

Tilak Siyambalapitiya stresses that the power cuts which will be caused by the non implementation of the coal power plant will result in losses amounting to Rs. 20 million a day. This I believe is an underestimate. When disruption to industries, the commercial sector, tourism, health services, water supplies and a host of other sectors affected by these power cuts are taken into account the national losses to the country will be far greater. If the power cuts continue for sometime - months and years, even the much coveted foreign investments already here, will close shop and relocate elsewhere in countries where there are no power shortages.

If the CEB remains stuck in the same Norachcholai groove without moving on to the safer and more superior site at Mawella and refuses to give this very timely advice to the President to request the Japanese to construct the coal power plant there, the country will surely have to face devastating power cuts. Then the CEB has to accept the blame for this disastrous situation and no and no one else.