

Opinion

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Reply to the Bishop of Chilaw

Norochcholai — Cats on Hot Bricks

A caller who accuses me constantly, on this subject, identifying himself as a Jayawardena, rang me up and insisted that I read the "Daily Mirror" of 30.12.03 where the Bishop of Chilaw Rt. Rev. Dr. Frank Marcus Fernando had given a statement to the press on an utterance made by the Minister for Power and Energy, Karu Jayasuriya. When I said that the Minister has already declared publicly that the Bishop had withdrawn his objections, he said in an unparliamentary language, meaning it's a diabolical untruth, and insisted that I read the article. Saying so, he dashed the receiver.

Immediately I sent for the newspaper and this is what it stated, which should not be allowed to pass without challenging, lest it would be taken for granted that what he said is true and consider readers nitwits. Subsequently, I read the same article in the Daily News of 1.1.04 and may appear in The Island in due course.

"It has been brought to our notice that the Minister of Power and Energy, Karu Jayasuriya has recently stated at a Public meeting that the Bishop of Chilaw has given his consent to the project, and as I knew the Minister sufficiently well, I suspected that there had been some confusion somewhere..."

I would add to this that the Minister had made this same statement on the floor of the House — Parliament. When the votes of his Ministry was taken up at the Committee stage. Thus misleading the parliament unless of course the statement of the Bishop is not accurate. In this connection, readers and the Bishop in particular are referred to my letter which appeared in The Island of 29.3.01 under the title "Hail! Bishop of Chilaw — Norochcholai Coal Power Plant" wherein I quoted the Bishop in the Gnanathra Pradeepya of 18.2.01 (Catholic newspaper) saying "It is the responsibility of the government to install. If done, it is done on government's own responsibility". This threat, perhaps made Karu Jayasuriya to take responsibility in abandoning the project, which, I presume, amounts to Bishop's agreement. On the other hand the Minister has been too gentlemanly to safeguard the good name of the Bishop and the Church for being severely criticised for the unreasonable, anti-national stand.

Now let me comment on the other statements made by the Bishop of Chilaw quoting from his report.

"What we are against is the choice of the place and not the use of Coal power as such".

Subject to correction, I remember reading in the newspapers (The Island?) that the Bishop once said that he opposes coal plants anywhere in the island. (on the Edition of The Island or any other reader correct me. I believe the CEB may be in a position throw some light on that politic written on this subject Dr. T. Siyambalapitiya, Energy

Consultant. However, if this statement is not true, I apologise to the Bishop and the reading public.

The next — "While we had some reservations that the plant could adversely affect the venerable shrine of St. Anne and the livelihood of the poor fishermen of the area..."

As for security is concerned, the whole world known that security cannot be absolutely sure, as seen in the case of attacks on the Twin Towers and Pentagon in USA and our own Dalada Maligawa, hallowed shrine. As regards 'poor Fishermen' and St. Anne's shrine, this is what the foreign consultants M/s. Romball of Denmark, appointed on the selection by the Bishop himself for an independent view says "4.3.3. It is therefore suggested to construct a near-shore landing facilities at the plant, as a small boat-harbour." This solution will have the result that most of the time when no import operations are on-going, the marine facilities will be gathered in the Boat harbour and the sea will be completely free from any structure. It will make easier to keep watch over the marine facilities as only the boat harbour right in front guarded". This means the 'poor fishermen' could carry on their fishing with out any hindrance. Please do not forget with the blessings and benevolence of St. Anne CEB will provide as promised permanent houses with sanitary facilities and electricity to these 'poor fishermen' which they would have never dreamt in their life-time; along with other welfare facilities, schools, hospitals etc. bringing in new hopes and aspirations to these 'poor fishermen'.

As for the shrine which is 13 km away from the project site, which is the main concern of the Bishop, the Consultants have paid special attention and have very definitely stated that the Coal plant at Norochcholai will have no effect at all and even will not cause any inconvenience or nuisance to the residents in the vicinity.

Next the Bishop says that he contacted Mr. Sriyaseela Wickramanayaka, Director, Master Divers, who has said "I am a patriot. I am prepared to go anywhere to state facts." Why did the patriot not go before the consultant M/s. Ramboll on why did not the Bishop force on encourage this patriot to do so? Was it fear of being exposed on his shallow reasoning or because the consultants' findings would be unfavourable to him as a businessman. It is my view that contractors cannot be independent consultants as they have their business interests.

The other statement is "the government of Chandrika Bandaranaike and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, both directed the authorities concerned to abandon the site at Norochcholi" and continues "The important part of it is that although many years passed since the President, having studied the project, rejected it." The truth, as we all well know, is that the Bishop who refuses to admit

that he elicited a promise from both political leaders — Chandrika Kumaratunga, H.E President, and Prime Minister, then Leader of the Opposition to abandon the project, taking the advantage and opportunity of the Wayamba Elections and the General Elections which followed. This was granted for obvious reasons. Did not the Bishop boast once that UNF won because of his influence over the Western Coastal belt? Then the multi-million dollar question is; why did the two leaders after the elections send their Ministers and officials on ended knees to the Bishop to beg permission? Was it after thought on restudying the project and the huge cry of the public and experts, realised their folly? It is reliably known that even a security wall round St. Anne's shrine was promised. Therefore the reasoning of the Bishop that the political leaders were convinced of the unsuitability of the site is a figment of his imagination.

The other statement of the Bishop is "All the time we were in contact with engineering experts and economists who had the welfare of the country at heart". If he had such experts, why did he insist on the government to appoint an independent foreign consultant and appointed M/s. Ramboll of Denmark, a choice and selection made by him? What is more he assigned two of his priests to assist the Consultants and chaired some meetings. Perhaps he was not satisfied with his own patriotic experts whom he now tries to cling on to. When a consultant is appointed with mutual concert — the government and the Bishop, it is not mandatory for both parties to accept and abide by the findings? (on the Bishop place his experts above world famous consultants engaged by the CEB such as Electrawatte Ltd, Sandwell Engineering of Canada, Pacific Consulting Institution of Japan, Hyaruces Ltd, Colombo Engineering Consultants of Colombo? Added to this array of experts and consultants, are our locals in the image of Dr. Mohan Munasinghe, Internationally accepted, rewarded and awarded, who has emphatically stressed the site at Norochcholai suitable and also eminent energy consultants Dr. Tilak Siyambalapitiya, Dr. Susatha Perera and CEB engineers who has spent much of their valuable time in sponsoring this project, not forgetting that prestigious Institute of Engineers in Sri Lanka.

One could excuse the Minister Karu Jayasuriya as a politician for concealing on twisting facts but what of a person in a mitre and robe?

Suppressio Veri Suggestion Falsi — Suppression of truth is suggestive of the false. I invite responses from unbiased readers.