

Norochcholai Coal Power Project

by G. A. D. Sirimal

The article on the above by Bishop of Chilaw appearing on 1.1.04 of *Daily News* needs to be contested with facts gathered from Consultant's reports, newspapers, seminars, T.V. discussions etc.

The Bishops's statement says:

1. "It has been brought to my notice that the Minister of Power and Energy, Karu Jayasuriya has recently stated at a public meeting that the Bishop of Chilaw had given his consent to the Norochcholai Coal Power Plant Project. 'I have never given my consent to this project....'

I would add that the Minister for Power and Energy had said this, not only at public meetings but also on the floor of the House - Parliament during the Committee stage of the Budget on the votes of the Ministry. He had also said earlier that the public is against, some Cabinet members oppose and now the statement in Parliament "Despite the fact that the UNF Government was against the Norochcholai Coal Power Plant, the Bishop gave the blessings to carry out the project. But now we have decided to build it elsewhere".

2. "Perhaps the Minister may have understood

what the Bishop had said in the Gnanartha Pradeepya of 18.2.01 (Catholic Sinhala newspaper) and repeatedly maintained "it is the responsibility of the government to install. If done, it is done on the governments' own responsibility". This statement does not preclude the Minister undertaking of the project and he may have expected the Bishop not to demonstrate or create an uproar. In fact the Minister has safeguarded the good name of the Bishop and the Church from being severely criticised for the unreasonable, anti-national stand.

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

Subject to correction, I remember reading in the newspapers that the Bishop has once said that he opposes coal plants anywhere in the island. Can any reader who has followed this issue very closely, perhaps the CEB, may be in a position to confirm. If this statement is not true, I apologise to the Bishop and the reading public.

3. "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, there were other overriding concerns besides. All the time we were in contact with engineering experts and economists who have the welfare of the country at heart".

As for security concerns, the whole world knows that security cannot be absolutely sure, as seen in the case of attacks on Twin Towers and Pentagon in USA and our own hallowed Shrine Dalada Maligawa. As regards the 'Poor Fishermen' this is what the foreign consultants M/s. Ramboll of Denmark appointed on the selection and choice of the Bishop had reported.

"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 completely be free from any structures. It will make easier to keep watch over the marine facilities as only the boat-harbour fight in front".

This means the 'Poor Fishermen' could carry on their fishing without any hindrance. It should be emphatically mentioned this section of the west coast is notorious for smuggling of narcotics from South India, as recent raids by the police show. This could be completely stopped if the coal plant is built, as there would be constant movement of ships and boats; unless of-course some are benefitted by conniving with the operators. These 'Poor Fishermen' will be provided with permanent houses complete with sanitary and electricity facilities, which they would have never dreamt of during their lifetime. Along with houses, hospital and schools will come up bringing new hopes and aspirations to the

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people. All these have been promised by the CEB.

As for the Shrine at Talawila - St. Anne's, the consultants have in no uncertain terms said that this shrine which is 13 Km away will not be affected not even those residents in close proximity to the Coal Plant.

4. "Incidentally, a few days ago, I contacted Mr. Ariyaseela, Director of Master Divers. He said 'I am a patriot. I am prepared to go anywhere and state with facts that Norochcholai is a totally unsuitable place for a Coal Plant'. Why did this patriot not go before the independent Consultants chosen by the Bishop and place his facts, or why did not the Bishop force this patriot to meet and discuss this matter? Was it due to the superior knowledge of the Consultants?

5. "The governments of Chandrika Bandaranaike and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, both directed the authorities concerned to abandon the site at Norochcholai..."

The important part of it is that many years have passed since President, having studied the project rejected it". The truth as we all know, is that the Bishop refuses to admit that he elected a promise

from both political Leaders - Chandrika

Kumaratunga, The President and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, the Leader of the Opposition to abandon this project, taking advantage and opportunity of the Wayamba Provincial Council Elections and the General Election which followed. This was granted for obvious reasons. Did not the Bishop once boast that UNF won because of his influence over the Western Coastal Belt? Then the very pertinent question to be posed is why did the two leaders after the elections, send their Ministers, officials on bended knees to the Bishop to beg permission? Was it after thought on restudying the project and the huge cry of public, including engineers, professionals, businessmen, Industrialists and experts, they 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.

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he had such experts, why did he pressurise the government to appoint an Independent Foreign consultant and appointed M/s. Ramboll of Denmark, a choice and selection of the Bishop? What is more, he assigned two priests to assist the Consultants as mentioned in the consultant's report, to look after the interest of the church and had himself chaired certain meetings. Perhaps he was not satisfied with his own patriotic experts whom he now tries to cling on to as the foreign consultants' report was not in his favour.

When a consultant is appointed with mutual consent - the government and the Bishop of Chilaw - is it mandatory for both parties to accept and abide by their findings? Can the Bishop of Chilaw place his experts above world famous engaged by the CEB such as Eletrowatte Ltd., Sandwell Engineering of Canada, Pacific Consulting Institution of Japan, Hydraulics Ltd, Colombo, Engineering Consultants of Colombo.

Added to this a ray of internationally accepted 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, also that eminent Energy Consultant, Dr. Thilak Siyambalapitiya, Dr. Susantha Perera of the CEB, and CEB Engineers, who have spent much of their valuable time and energy in sponsoring this project, not forgetting that prestigious Institute of Engineers in Sri Lanka.

Suppressio Veri Suggestio Falsi - Suppression of truth is suggestive of false.

(The writer is Former Asst. Secretary, Ministry of Power and Energy).

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