

Our objections to Norochcholai still remain as firm as ever, Bishop of Chilaw

by Dilanthi Jayamanne

One of the most vehement opponents to the Norochcholai coal-power project, the Bishop of Chilaw, has said that it was absurd to think he would agree to the plan which electricity experts have mooted as an important step towards solving the country's long-term power needs.

"It is absurd," said Rev. Dr. Marcus Fernando in a press statement, "to suggest that I who struggled against this project from the very beginning with valid reasons would now agree to it at a time when foreign experts themselves have rejected it."

"Our objections to Norochcholai still remain as firm as ever," he stressed.

Rev. Dr. Fernando was responding to recent reports that he had finally given his blessing to the Norochcholai coal-fired power plant. "Some people have tried to create the impression that the Bishop of Chilaw, who had objected all along to the Norochcholai Project has now agreed to it," the statement said.

It pointed out that experts from Denmark, who were consulted by the government, have totally rejected the 4.2 kilometre jetty that was to be the lifeline of the coal power plant.

He emphasised he had reiterated all along that the government should take adequate safety measures to ensure the safety of the people in whatever part of the country they finally decided to erect the power plant.

He refused to make any further comments regarding the matter.

The Ministry of Power and Energy and the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) have been criticising environmentalists and the Bishop of Chilaw for hindering the government's plans to implement the coal power plant. The country has been going through a spell of darkness which commenced with one-and-a-half hours in the month of July and increased up to eight hours during the last two months.

Ministerial sources said that the power crisis had turned into a national issue which had to be solved speedily.

The Japanese aid which the Government was to have received for the completion of the coal-fired power plant was also channelled elsewhere when Sri Lanka's plans were blocked. "We would have to commence our negotiations with Japan once again in 2003 if we are to receive Japanese aid to complete the plant," they said.

"The number of hours have decreased since the beginning of October, but the power cuts have caused great losses to the massive industries as well as the small time businessmen in the suburbs of the city and the outstations," they noted.

"Everyone has turned their wrath on the government and the CEB for the situation. People are frustrated with these power cuts which seem to be the only thing that is carried out sharp on time," said a small time shop owner from Kiribathgoda recently who was serving his customer with the aid of a petromax lamp.

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