

Letter

14/03/01 Island
Power, people, poverty and Norachcholai

In order to lend credibility to what I write, it would help to state that I was Chairman of the Central Environmental Authority, in late '90 and early '91. I was Advisor to the Authority before that and have been closely associated with the Ministry of Environment, ever since, on Expert Committees on Global Warming and Biodiversity. I represented Sri Lanka in the final stages of the drafting of the Framework Convention on Climate Change at the UN in New York in early 1992.

During the debate that raged around the Trincomalee Power project, I expressed one reservation, only one: - I said it would be damaging to release the hot water effluent into the shallow waters of Tambelagam Bay. I was fully supportive of the project. Later when the Mawella Proposal was taken up, I drew

up the terms of reference for the required EIA for that project.

It is a matter for much regret that my name was used in the campaign against the Norachcholai project, grossly misquoting the views that I had expressed in relation to the Trincomalee project. I was quoted, wrongly, in a diocesan Newsletter and in a note sent to schools. Recently, I wrote to the Bishop of Chilaw. He has been gracious enough to reply, accepting that an error had been made and assuring me that my name will not be dragged into this any more.

I have, since written to the President, with copies of my letter to the Bishop of Chilaw and the relevant documents with misquotes. I have urged the President earnestly, to reconsider the Norachcholai project and bring it on line as early as possible. I referred also, to your recent leader emphasizing the

urgent need for action in this regard, in the national interest.

I think it is the well recognized energy expert, Dr. Siyambalapitiya, who wrote recently that this country needs an affordable and dependable source of power, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks of the year, for all time. In the absence of such sources of power this country faces a logical and entirely predictable sequence of tragedy - 'no foreign investment in industry, no meaningful economic advancement, no income generation, no poverty alleviation and rising tides of unemployment. It is the People who will suffer if power is denied.

We have no short-or medium-term option but to go for coal fired power plants. The best available technologies can be used. Concerns such as the

Bishop of Chilaw and his flock have expressed can be specifically addressed and adverse effects can be minimized. However, the concerns of a few, which as I say are not without remedies, cannot stand in the way of the wellbeing of a nation.

I would like to let it be known that I, as a Marine Biologist and Oceanographer, and as one of the most senior Environmental Scientists in this country, stand for square behind the early development of state of the art coal fired power projects not alone at Norachcholai but also at other suitable sites, as well.

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