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Premajayantha comes to CEB, CPC rescue

By Munza Mushtaq

In a hard hitting speech Power and Energy Minister Susil Premajayantha held a strong brief for the loss making Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) and the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) yesterday.

The Minister's statement comes in the midst of attacks against the two institutions for poor performance which has led to the financial crisis gripping them.

"Some are calling the CEB and CPC as 'bhaiyas' waiting in the queue to get money from the government coffer. Both these institutions are giant organizations, which were making profits just a few years ago.

The CEB has suddenly fallen into a mess because of the issue on how to generate electricity cheap," the Minister said, and added that the CEB or CPC are not institutions which should really go begging for financial assistance.

Speaking yesterday at the opening of the Board's call centre, the Minister emphasized that vital power projects which had to be implemented many years ago have been stalled by the authorities in the past.

"After the Kukule ganga hydro power project, not a single new project has been implemented. For the past ten years we have not implemented a new power project," the Minister noted.

"We don't need people to go

around the country to places like Galagedera and make harsh statements against the CEB and CPC. It is also not the fault of the CEB and CPC's fault that they have to face the fluctuation of the dollar," Minister Premajayantha said.

Citing reasons for his claim on the United States dollar, Premajayantha pointed out that when certain deals with Independent Power Producers were sealed about four to five years back, the US dollar was only in the range of Rs. 63, but today it is over 100 rupees.

"Is it the fault of the Power and Energy Ministry, CPC or CEB that the Finance Ministry cannot stabilize the dollar fluctuation," the Minister queried.

The Minister also emphasized that until the Coal Power Plant and the Upper Kotmale Hydro Power projects are completed, it was impossible to reduce the electricity tariffs.

He also reiterated that a change within the CEB was necessary. But it should continue to remain a Government entity. He also vowed to go ahead with the coal power project and Upper Kotmale projects despite opposition, and protest campaigns. "We are ready to face the protests," he vowed.

Finance Minister Sarath Amunugama in early May at a public rally held in Galagedera called the CEB and CPC workers as kaalakanniyaas.