

Power crisis and delayed thermal projects

by Irosha Weththasingha

The present power crisis would not have occurred if the planned thermal power plants projects by the government had been made operative on schedule.

Acting Secretary to the Ministry of Irrigation and Power, Ananda Gunasekara, said yesterday.

Speaking at an awareness seminar on "Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Development in Sri Lanka," he said that all thermal power plant projects were way behind schedule, because of the various environmental complications related to them.

"Sri Lanka faces a drought period once in every four years, and then the country faces a power crisis because the water levels in reservoirs go down drastically," said Mr. Gunasekera revealing that at

present sixty per cent of the electricity is being generated from thermal power due to the shortage of water in reservoirs.

"Hydropower wise there are very few potential resources and these resources are not adequate to fill the growing demand for electricity which doubles every ten years," he said. He also revealed that in future thermal power plants would be operated by the private sector because the government cannot afford to invest in them.

According to statistics, in 1999 the contribution of the thermal power to the total power supply which was 29% had increased to 35% this year. The acting secretary said that several more coal power projects are under consideration. "If these thermal power plants projects are not implemented in time, Sri Lanka would face even more serious power crises by year

2005" he warned.

"The government has spent millions of rupees on surveys and plans for projects and when it comes to the implementation stage, an environment problem crops up stalling the process," he said. Referring to the Kukuleganga hydropower plant, which is under construction, he said the project was four years behind schedule because of environmental issues.

"We are struggling to create a balance between these two because a power crisis would have serious repercussions on the economy of the country", he

added.

Speaking at the seminar Vice Chairman of the Inter-government Panel for Climate Changes (IPCC), Prof. Mohan Munasingha, said that sustainable development should come first in the society. He said that developed countries are more responsible for environmental damage than developing countries. "But developing countries suffer the consequences of this pollution. He pointed out that Sri Lanka should be careful about the sea level going up and about harmful effects this pollution has on agriculture.