

Coal power plant phobia

Despite the horrendous inconvenience heaped on electricity consumers at the present time, I was disgusted to see the outburst of Mr. Riyal Prematillake (Environmentalist), in a discussion with Dr. Tilak Siyambalapitya, refer to the Coal Power Plant as "Yakek, Yakek". Despite the logical reasoning and numerous examples this environmental guardian arrived with a mental block and nothing the learned Dr. said passed his understanding. It seemed he had a blind phobia and the economic ruin of the country was beyond his comprehension. I am sure this gentleman has never been anywhere near a Coal Power Plant, but he is nevertheless, strangely fully aware of its mal-effects. He ignores that more than half the world's power is generated from Coal, as pointed out by Dr. S.T.

His objections were 1) Sulphur emissions, 2) Effects of using sea water for plant cooling 3) Ash deposition. All which were disposed of quite effectively by Dr. S. However I would like to add the following with regard to the first two.

With regard to Sulphur oxide emissions the way the Eco Nuts beat their drums, it would seem that this is the first time such emissions would cloud our environment here. Now the Sapugaskande Complex, which includes the oil refinery and fuel oil based power plants emit about 90 tons of sulphur dioxides per 24 hour day, and this has gone on for almost 30 years for the greater part. Surely, if there were gross problems from this large emission, it would have obviously shown up.

The Kelani Maha Vihara is less than five km away, and there is much vegetation all around. I am told the EPA has conducted many checks including those for acid rain but no noticeable detrimental problems have surfaced. Indeed the tropical climate helps in dispersion of the emissions and there is no inversion plumes as found in the cold climates.

In addition, the diesel vehicles emit at ground level nearly 120 tons of Sulphurous

oxides a day. Yet these gross emissions don't get the attention of the Environmentalists, and more important draw any relevant conclusions. The Coal Plant is located many miles away and the ground level concentration of Sulphur emissions in the Western province, which is the high density populated area, may not even be measurable, which is directly attributable to the Coal Power Plant.

The way the environmentalists present their case we could well become the laughing stock of the scientific world. One Professor even predicted that the entire climate of Lanka will change due to the warm sea water effluent floating around the Island. As any school boy science student will explain hot water sinks and does not float purely, because it has a lower density. The writer has personal knowledge of mega sized Plants erected in the West Coast of Saudi Arabia. These are huge Desalination cum Power Plants, and over 2000MW, sited near Jeddah, and all the cooling water is from the Red Sea and now operating over 30 years.

For every ten gallons of sea water, the desalination plants takes in, it lets out about nine gallons, so that in addition to heat in the effluent, it is also concentrated sea water. Now Jeddah coast has one of the most beautiful coral formations, and exquisite ornamental fish, which is a tourist attraction. The Saudis are indeed careful guardians of their environment and have a functioning Environmental Protection Agency via Royal Commissions, and have the means to mitigate any adverse effects. Up to the time, the writer was in Jeddah in 1990 no such bad effects were reported. In addition, on the West Coast, there are several

other mega Plants 350,000 BPSD Oil Refinery in Rabigh, 600 MW Power Plant also in Rabigh, and then there is the Yanbu Industrial Complex with several large refineries, and Power Plants. Indeed, the sea water cooling system in Yanbu is like a river, supplying all plants and the effluent sea water is allowed to cascade into the sea. If what our local environmentalists are fearing is true, then the Red Sea should become a veritable boiling cauldron, and other countries like Israel, Egypt should have protested. The fish from the Red Sea is as delectable as ever, and indeed in warmer waters corals seem to flourish better. What is this hot water they are talking about - water at 37 degrees Celsius (or 98.6 Fahrenheit) - luke warm water may call! Body temperature! Similarly, in the east coast of Arabia, into the many huge industrial plants send the cooling water effluent into the Arabian gulf. Both the Red Sea and Arabian Gulf are almost inland seas, and if there were any adverse effects they would be magnified. Such problems of any magnitude have been reported. Here we have the entire Indian Ocean to dilute the sea water effluent.

It is evident that our environmentalists have made a demon out of the Coal Power Plant for which there is not a rational basis, and we will achieve a dubious first in world for cancelling a Coal based Power Plant for bogus environmental reasons.

Let not ignorance and misplaced fears, phobias, and irrational fear psychosis for which there is no scientific basis, dictate the much needed power projects in this country.

S. Weerasekera
Wellawatte

Opinion