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A reply from CEB

The coal power plant issue: 3 questions

I refer to the letter in your issue of March 22 under the above title written by an anonymous "Energy anxious Lankan". I wish the writer had given his/her name, as what had been written are certainly words of wisdom. Be that as it may, the writer has raised three questions in particular which I consider it is my duty to answer as a person responsible for the planning of future generation options for CEB.

The Norochcholai plant was first identified in 1992/93 by a group of Japanese experts who were assigned the task of identifying viable sites for coal power development in the West Coast of Sri Lanka. This team identified four sites. One such site was in Negombo on the Pamunuwa road in the narrow strip between the lagoon and the sea. Two sites were in Marawila and the other in Puttalam in the Kalpitiya peninsula just south of the very famous Thalawila church. Upon further study, it was revealed that, Negombo site was untenable as the tall chimneys which would be approximately 450 ft. tall would interfere with the flight path of the aircraft taking off and landing at Katunayake International Airport. Further, a very large population would have to be relocated.

The Negombo-Pamunuwa road had to be re-routed and part of the lagoon had to be reclaimed. The two sites in Marawila too were having similar problems of relocation of a large number of families, tourist hotels and even church cemeteries. On the other hand, there were several sites in the Puttalam peninsula which were very suitable for such a development. Land devoid of cultivation and people were available. In fact, four different sites which were suitable were found in the peninsula. After detailed studies carried out to ascertain availability of land, number of people to be relocated, the depth of the sea at proximity to beach, extent of cultivation in the land and other engineering aspects, a site 12 km south of the St. Anne's shrine was selected as the most suitable of the four sites in the peninsula.

Detailed feasibility studies were carried out commencing in end of 1996. A detailed Environmental Impact Assessment Study was carried out with the involvement of expatriate and local experts. The EIA report was subjected to thorough scrutiny by two panels of experts set up by the Coast Conservation

Department and the North Western Provincial Environmental Authority with the full participation of the Central Environmental Authority. The EIA was opted on two different occasions for public scrutiny. After thorough deliberation by over thirty experts in various fields, the CCD and the North Western Provincial Environmental Authority independently approved the EIA. The environmental clearance for part of the transmission line which traverses the water province was granted by the nominated Project Approving Agency the Ministry of Irrigation and Power. There are very stringent conditions under which these approvals are granted making the construction and operation of the power plant subject to these conditions.

Now to answer the three specific questions the writer raised.

these facts could be independently verified in the Internet.)

2. How safe are the structures to be built in the site from terrorist attacks?

As Sri Lankans we are in a very unfortunate situation where we have to be extremely cautious in deciding on the commitment of large sums of money for vital installations such as this. When such installations are to be done for the purpose of continued development of our country one has to be extra vigilant that such installations are protected against attacks. Security aspects of such installations are best handled by authorities who have the experience to deal with them. As in any other vital installation, in any part of the country this too will have to be firmly secured against any threat of a terrorist attack. We have taken this aspect into very serious consideration and dis-

Opinion

1. Will there be adequate quantities of coal for purchase in the world?

The simple answer is yes. The coal reserves in the world are adequate for yet another 250 years as against for oil 40 years and Natural Gas for 60 years. These facts are easily available in the internet and well published literature world over and for the benefit of the writer, let me assure that if for some reason coal mines in UK were closed down that was for many other reasons than the lack of reserves. Furthermore Japan is not a major coal producing and exporting country but a large coal importing country. The reports show that Japan is continuing to build more coal power plants and will continue to import coal for a long time to come.

What is more important to note, is that coal unlike in the case of oil, is not confined to a politically sensitive region such as the Middle East, but is widely spread in many parts of the world such as South Africa, Australia, Europe (both east and west), America and in the Asian continent, in countries such as India, China and Indonesia in particular. Further unlike oil, the price of coal in the world market has not been subject to any drastic fluctuations. (All

cussed it thoroughly with the proper authorities empowered to take decisions on those matters. Accordingly, the security aspects will be dealt with, in a proper manner at the appropriate time.

On the other hand, I am sure the writer would agree that the development work in the country should move on, in spite of the difficult situation, the country is in. If not, we will be like that famous cat who did not catch the mouse because she was not decided on which foot to keep first.

3. Will not the Palk Strait deepening project have any adverse impact?

Let me assure the writer with an emphatic 'No'.

I have taken the liberty to highlight some historical facts and further clarifications that many other readers would also like to have and hope that the writer of the above titled article would be satisfied. If he or any other would like to get any more information on the project, The Ceylon Electricity Board will be only too glad to assist you.

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