

Treasury cuts short CEB

A recent news report stated that the Treasury had taken steps to implement a plan, apparently drawn up by them and extending over a 10-year period, to solve the power crisis.

Considering the frequent allegations of unprecedented corruption, mismanagement, negligence and colossal waste and misappropriation of public funds, when judged by the rapid deterioration of every sector of public activity in the country during the last few years, the latest manipulations by the Treasury come as no surprise.

But, what seems unbelievable in this instance is the rare courage, unheard of in recent times, displayed by Mr. Ariyananda, the Chairman of the CEB. Even whilst holding office, he boldly brought to the attention of the public, both through the press and the TV on which he appeared a day or two before a report in a daily newspaper, the serious irregularity, if not illegality, being committed by the Treasury.

The Chairman must be commended for the exemplary step he has dutifully taken, as the head of a statutory authority, to draw the attention of the public to a matter that is likely to have lasting adverse economic consequences. (The statutory authority has been charged with the responsibility of providing electricity at a realistic cost.)

The professionals and particularly the engineers whose counterparts in the CEB have been recently much maligned, should wholeheartedly endorse this initiative and emulate the lead given by him.

The Treasury has so far not denied or refuted the statements made against it and we must presume that they are well founded. Therefore, this is a sound case where the CEB, the professionals and the public must commence a campaign to condemn such action and to ensure that it is not repeated.

The CEB must stand together and give a firm warning to the Treasury that unless they call off their project the CEB will have nothing to do with it. The CEB should completely handle it on their own along with the BOI or PERC or any other organisation which may have advised them on matters including the distribution of the power they intend to generate.

The professionals through the OPA must evolve a strategy for supporting professionals employed in the public sector faced with situations where irregularities are taking place around them. They are pressurised to carry out illegal orders, which are against public policy or the public professionals who are victimised as a result of resisting such activities. There should be in place a confidence-building arrangement where those faced with such problems who feel marginalised, may confidentially consult another experienced and competent professional selected from a list drawn up by the OPA.

The OPA must also consider instituting legal action in the public interest to stop the Treasury from acting on the matter in question if the CEB act or any other legislation prevents them from doing so.

The public must express their resentment to the hijacking of the specialist duties assigned to CEB by law and must go as far as declaring that they prefer to be in the dark than to subscribe to a project which does not have their overall interests at heart.

Society must be prepared to react fast and effectively to serious irregularities with drastic and unorthodox counter-measures. Unless this happens, the carnival for those who work to achieve their own personal agendas will continue, and the culture of corruption and indiscipline that is strangulating the country will come to stay regardless of who is in the driving seat.

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