News_COP_2003-11.pdf

19th May 2003 Daily mirror

Coal merry-go-round

By Munza Mushtaq

With successive governments continuing to merrily-go-around the country to find a suitable site for the vital coal power plant, energy experts have warned that by the time the actual plant comes up, the country would not need a coal power plant as the country's industrial sector would have been dead due to the high electricity prices.

The government also came under heavy criticism by the energy experts, who did not wish to be named, saying that "it is sad that the government was only giving ear to the cocktail circuit and not to the professionals."

The experts alleged that the government was unable to take a decision on coal because many (people from the cocktail circuit) were not in favour of a coal plant as they want more oil-based power plants to come up as it brings more financial gains for many unlike coal.

For the past 20 years, successive governments have failed to make the much-needed decision on where to set up the coal power plant. In 1982 Trincomalee was chosen for the construction of the plant. It was then shifted to Matara (Mawella) in 1990, then to Norochcholai in 1994 as the then President Premadasa did not want the plant to be set up in Matara. However in Norochcholai once again there were protests headed by the Bishop of Chilaw, and in 2002 it was moved again to Clappenberg in Trincomalee. However in late 2002, the government again changed location to Hambantota.

They went on to say that as the government has now identified Hambantota for the coal plant not counting possible opposition there, it would take three years for the feasible project to be conducted, to see whether a plant could be constructed there or not. Then another one year to find the funds for the project and another four years for the construction of the plant. It would be 2012, and by then, the country would not require the coal plant as it has been dominated by oil-based power plants, and due to the staggering amounts the country would be paying which would be around Rs. 11.50 per unit of electricity, the country's industry would be killed.

Private power consultant Tilak Siyambalapitiya who has been strongly lobbying for coal, told the Daily Mirror at present a unit of electricity costs Rs. 7.80/-, and this is the highest price in Asia except for Nepal, Japan and India. He added that if the government took a decision ten years back to set up a coal plant, today we would be only paying Rs. 1.60/- per unit rather than the present price of Rs. 5.50/-.