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Conserve power or face cuts, says CEB

By Hiranthi Fernando

The Ceylon Electricity Board appeals to the public to conserve power in order to avert power cuts. The severe drought in the catchment areas of the reservoirs has brought the country to the brink of a power crisis.

During the last 12 months there has been little rain in these areas, thus causing a sharp reduction of the water levels in the reservoirs. Unless the south-west monsoon sets in within the next week,

power cuts may become unavoidable.

'If the public cooperates by reducing consumption, we will not have to resort to measures that inconvenience the people, such as cutting of power supplies', said Ananda Gunasekera, Acting Secretary, Ministry of Power and Irrigation at a press conference on Friday. He said the purpose of the press conference was to explain to the media the position regarding power supplies.

Due to the prevailing

drought in the catchment areas, the volume of water in the reservoirs has been reduced to an average of 18% as at today. During the last few days, the consumption of electricity has been as much as 20 million units per day.

Acting General Manager, D.C. Wijeratne explained that if the drought continues it will not be possible to meet the peak demand, which is at night. When the water level drops to a certain level, some machines will have to be shut down because the turbines

cannot work. For example, the water level at the Castlereigh reservoir has dropped to 49 feet below spill level and at Moussakelle to 61 feet below spill level. The lowest level they can go down to is 59 and 72 feet respectively. If the levels drop further, electricity cannot be generated from the water in those reservoirs.

Mr. Wijeratne said that simple measures to conserve power by the public can help to carry on with power supplies for a few days more. 'However, if we have one or

two days of rain for a couple of hours, we can get over the problem', he said.

The Chairman, Ceylon Electricity Board, Arjun Deraniyagala requested the media to convey to the public the need to conserve power at this critical juncture.

'Unfortunately, power consumption has gone up drastically, while we were trying to conserve', he said. He stressed that it was necessary to be careful by using minimum lighting. In households, a conscious effort to reduce

the use of fans and irons can help. In the case of commercial and industrial establishments, starting up the air-conditioning one hour later and shutting it down an hour earlier is recommended. Illumination at carnivals should be stopped or reduced. Neon signboards and advertisements should be switched off. Even in the case of street lights, every alternate light could be switched off. 'If we adopt such measures, we can effect a considerable reduction in the consumption', Mr.

Deraniyagala said.

Today, over 60% of the power supply is supplied by thermal power and approximately 40% by hydro power. During the power crisis in 1996, the consumption was 14 million units per day, while today it has increased to 20 million units. In 1996, there were two thermal generation plants at Sapugaskanda and Kelanitissa generating three to four million units per day. Today CEB thermal power stations generate about 12

million units of power per day. It also has a scheme to purchase power from private sector owners of generators and mini hydro power systems to augment the national grid. It is felt that if the daily consumption of power could be reduced by two million units harsh measures could be avoided. If the consumption is not reduced, the CEB is considering the imposition of a temporary surcharge on excess usage and the extreme measure would be the power cuts.