



Coal power: need of the hour

by SUREKHA GALAGODA

Every Sri Lankan should call for the establishment of coal power plants without delay as coal power is the cheapest source of energy, said a top official of the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB).

D.G.D.C. Wijeratne, General Manager CEB said the CEB is at present in a position to supply the electricity requirement of the country, but the demand and price of electricity is increasing daily. "We should go for coal-based power generation as there is no other way to provide power at low cost," he said.

He said that though most people promote renewable energy projects such as wind and solar, they are very costly. He was of the view that such projects should not be undertaken unless they are given as foreign

grants because the costs will otherwise have to be borne by the consumers who cannot afford them at all.

Mr Wijeratne said our economy will collapse if we keep on increasing the price of electricity which is too high even at present.

In countries such as Australia and Africa, 90 per cent of the power requirements are supplied by coal power generation. On average, only one per cent of the energy demand in the world is supplied by renewable energy projects.

"Oil-based power costs Rs 7 per unit at generation while the selling price is Rs 11 per unit.

A country like Sri Lanka cannot afford the cost of oil and it will badly affect the economy. Therefore, unless we choose a

cheap source of energy, the price of electricity will never come down," he said.

As the proposed coal power plant is being shifted from place to place, the Energy Services Commission has requested the project proposers to suggest a suitable location which will help reduce the hassle.

Speaking of power cuts, Mr Wijeratne said that there will not be any in the near future. "However, if our estimates fall short, we might have to impose them, but that would be in an extreme situation."

He said the CEB can generate 1150 mega watts of hydro power. While it can generate between 3600 and 3800 million units during a good year, this can drop between 2600 and 2800 in a worst year.

Plans are also afoot to commission the Kelanitissa combined cycle power plant

which will generate 165 mega watts while the 20MW power plant at Horana and the 110MW generated by AES will be connected this month or early January next year. Therefore, we will take away the emergency power plants from the grid early next year, he added.

Mr Wijeratne said the power supply to Jaffna has been restored by purchasing the power generated by diesel stations owned by the private sector and assured that supply will be increased in keeping with the demand.

He said that although the Jaffna line was earlier connected to Anuradhapura, the supply was stopped due to the problems in the North and East. It will take at least another two or three years to restore the supply from Anuradhapura, he said.