

by Dr. Tilak Siyambalapitiya

Many readers responded to my article on Norochcholai and Electricity Prices (The ISLAND, 2nd Nov 2005). Mr Joseph Jayaseelan (The ISLAND, Nov 9, 2005) wrote on many issues about the Norochcholai project. He stated that the Bishop of Chilaw is not against the project but the selection of the site. This makes Mr Jayaseelan's arguments later in his article against coal power to be irrelevant. First, all must understand that electricity system development in Sri Lanka will not come to an end with the implementation of the Norochcholai Power Plant. The country is not looking for A site to build THE coal plant. The country needs to add at least an average of 150 MW of new capacity every year, and to reach economies of scale, larger power plants have to be built. The country has only three siting areas for these large power plants: the East Coast, the West Coast and the South Coast. The other two sites will have to be developed after Norochcholai. Why on the coast? Because all power plants require cooling water, and the worldwide practice is to use sea water for cooling. Even Italy uses coal power plants on the coast to produce electricity, to supply the Pope's electricity requirements at the Vatican!

However, the general public of the country including the Archbishop, other Catholic Bishops, Priests, the Catholic community including this writer, and non-Catholics, including those 30,000 families who were displaced to build the six power plants in the Mahaweli System, are fully aware that it is the Bishop of Chilaw who has been blocking this project. I agree with Mr. Jayaseelan that anybody has the right to protest on any matter, whether the issue directly affects them or not. But has any one of the protestors seen a modern coal-fired power plant? Mr. Jayaseelan, are you aware that the Bishop of Chilaw blocked anybody representing the Catholic Church from participating in the fact finding tour of coal power plants abroad, organised by the Government in the late 1990s? Other civic organisations in the area participated.

Church and the Pilgrims

The Bishop began his protests in mid-nineties, claiming the power plant will affect the Thalawila Shrine and still continues to say that pilgrims to the church will be disturbed by the security provided to the power plant. The Bishop is fully aware that the power plant fence will be at least 1 km from the road to Thalawila, and the Church itself is 11 km from the Power Plant. Mr Jayaseelan may be aware that there is 500 MW of power generating capacity at Kelanitissa, and there you have three public highways just 3 meters (not kilometers) from the power plant fence, and a city road along the fourth perimeter. St Lucia's Cathedral and all the churches in Colombo City including the Archbishop's House, and the Thewatte Basilica are all within 11 km radius from Kelanitissa and the refinery/power plant complex at Sapugaskanda. Kelaniya Temple is between Kelanitissa and Sapugaskanda. The Bishop and Mr Jayaseelan would have on numerous occasions, and over half-million people daily drive, walk or cycle along the fence of the 500 MW Kelanitissa Power Plant. It must be clear to all the 3.4 million electricity customers who painfully pay higher electricity bills, that claims by the Bishop, initially that the Church (11 km away) will

be washed away, and later that the pilgrims will be disturbed by the security provided to the Power Plant, have absolutely no basis.

The Bishop and Mr. Jayaseelan quote

to the people there, and judge for yourselves which one is the better site. In Dungalpitiya, do not forget to look at the aeroplanes landing and taking-off at Katunayake going right above your head,

of protests against the shifting of the runway.

Or visit Mawella and Hambantota. See the land available, study the previous reports, talk to the 500 families to be re-

land at all? That is precisely what the Catholic Church should be doing: identify the needy, and get the maximum compensation for all those who are to be re-located or affected. If they do not have electric-

next generation of this country. They do not understand the concept of growth.

The package of benefits to the families to be displaced has already been included in the Power Plant approvals; bargain on your people's behalf and get the maximum compensation for them. The rest of Mr. Jayaseelan's comments on tsunami displaced are not relevant to this discussion, because re-location of those living in the Government land and elsewhere is a precondition to commence work on any power plant; Environmental Regulation are very clear on that. The tsunami came with no such preconditions.

Mr. Jayaseelan has attempted to explain how the price of other goods will also increase, and hence said that the rise in electricity prices would be acceptable. This argument amply displays a deep-rooted problem with the various lobbies: they do not understand the meaning of price calculation in constant currency (the note beneath the price calculations table in my Nov 2nd article). Some do not understand what load dispatch and capacity factor mean (THE ISLAND Business, Brian Tissera and Mubarak, 9th Nov. 2005), and make wild allegations about under-utilisation of power plant capacities. EFL publishes articles saying that existing power plants are under-utilised, as if all households and industries use their maximum power 24-hours a day. Sri Lanka should have made Electric Power Generation Planning and Operations as subjects to be taught from the kindergarten, to ensure the likes of Mr. Jayaseelan, Brian Tissera, Mubarak, EFL and the Bishop of Chilaw, and all the citizens of Sri Lanka understand adequately about these issues.

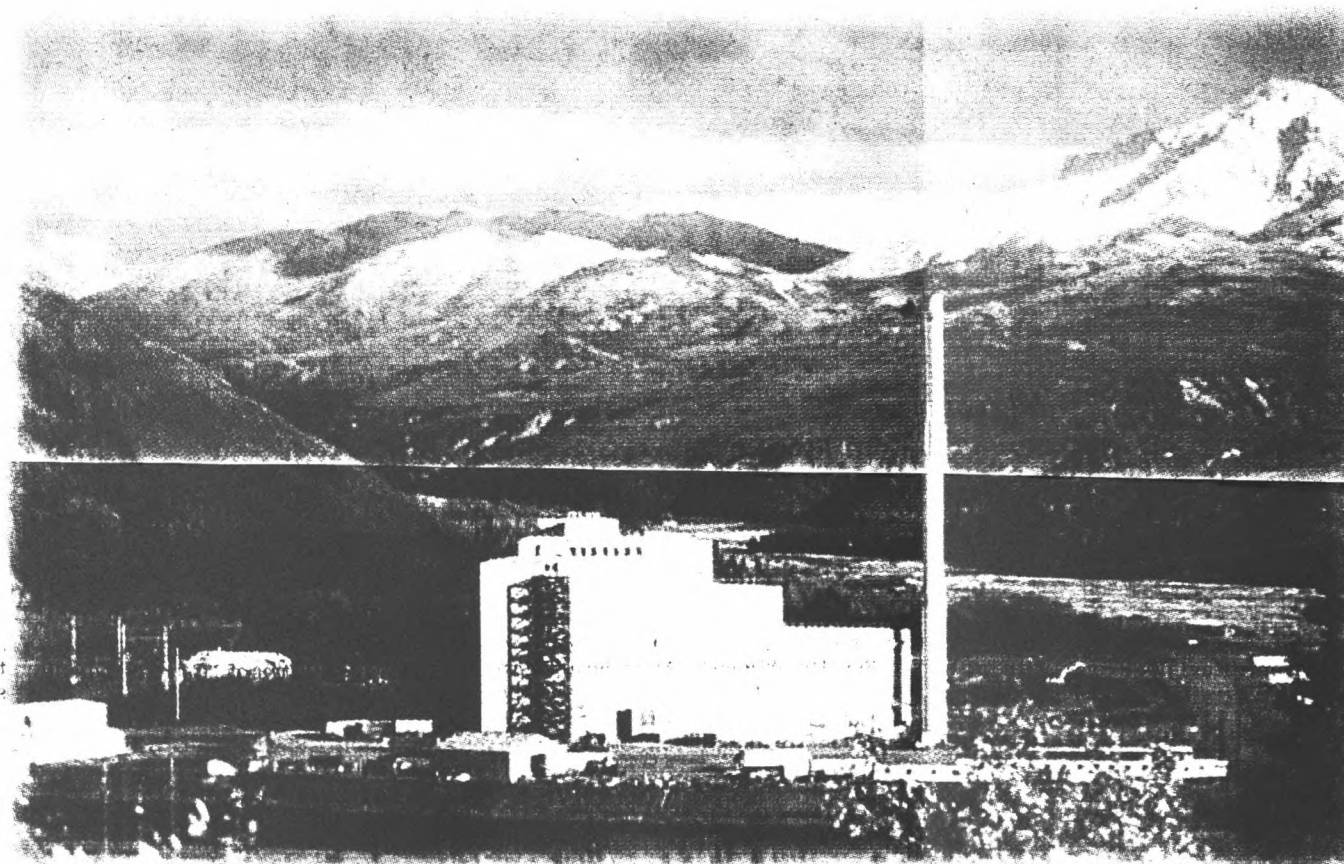
Iranawila and Kandalama

The Bishop's severe protests in the early nineties on Iranawila and Kandalama, and what happened to them are well known. They were essentially private projects, with benefits only to strategic interests of a friendly Government and high-spending tourists, respectively. The projects went ahead and are operational today for over ten years. The only deaths from those projects were during the protests organised by the Bishop of Chilaw before they were built, not afterwards. Norochcholai has already claimed one life at the protests organized by the Bishop of Chilaw in 1997, while the entire country is slowly moving towards sure economic death.

Mr. J. Varnakulasinghe, claiming expertise on high voltage lines in Britain, also wrote a responses to my article about power generation and economics, to only to the ISLAND but to many other newspapers. Mr. Varnakulasinghe's article is dotted with inaccuracies and assumptions, ranging from the quantum of funds allocated to the project, to a committee of his imagination, which apparently recommended a railway line for coal transport. Come Mr. Varnakulasinghe, publish your financial models to show how a private power developer can produce electricity at Rs 5.00 a unit, and show what would be the price of electricity in Sri Lanka by 2010-2012.

The nation enjoyed the controversy at Norochcholai, some blamed the Bishop, others blamed the Government and its agencies including the CEB. All of you are now paying a portion of the Bishop's electricity bill. The balance will be asked for shortly, now that the elections are over. The sum to be shared among you electricity customers is not less than Rs. 206 billion, increasing at Rs. 56 million per day. Thoroughly enjoy the debate for now, pay later with interest.

Bishop of Chilaw and Norochcholai: A response



from a site selection study done in early 1990s by a team from an institution called JCI. You need to understand a few points (1) The process of planning any infrastructure project goes in a sequence: site selection study, pre-feasibility study, feasibility study, engineering services, and social-environmental impact studies. (2) Norochcholai is not the site that was given low marks in the JCI study, as stated by the Bishop; that site was only 2 km South of the Thalawila Church, while the site approved under the Environment Act is 11 km away (3) The other three sites selected by JCI were Marawila, near "Kurusu Palliya", (over 300 families to be relocated), a site South of Kurusu Palliya (over 300 families), and Dungalpitiya (over 300 families).

Other Sites

If you still claim Norochcholai was given low marks by JCI, then go with the Bishop and see the sites that were given high marks by JCI, whom you admire. Talk

and visualise a 150 meter tall power plant chimney at this location. Also at Dungalpitiya, visualise how the Dungalpitiya church has to be demolished and existing highway be sent in a tunnel under the power plant. By quoting the other sites in the JCI study, the Bishop is virtually saying that sites in Dungalpitiya, Marawila (1) and Marawila (2), two of which are in the Bishop's own diocese are superior to Norochcholai. Try and get the 300 families to agree to be relocated from their own land (they are not occupying Government land as in Norochcholai), leaving well-built houses, even at this late stage. In Marawila site 1, also look at the newly-built hotel that has to be demolished.

So, if the Bishop wants to pick the site in Negombo (Dungalpitiya) which was given the highest marks by JCI whom the Bishop admires, then the country has to shift the air port runway at least 2 km away, and then the Bishop and the priests in the area can organise yet another round

cated at Mawella, look at the Mawella lagoon to be filled. Go to the Environmental agencies and ask how they would compare filling the Mawella lagoon and relocating 500 families, against 34 at Norochcholai, no filling of any lagoon. Count the number of families to be relocated in Hambantota to get the 100 hectare of land required for the power plant. Go to Trinco, ask the site to be shown to you. If you find one, compare it with Norochcholai.

Mr. Jayaseelan may be correct that there would be more than 34 families living in the Government land now, with or without permission. The previous count was in 1997, and Mr. Jayaseelan would be aware that when people hear of compensation packages being offered to permit holders or squatters on a Government land, more people come and occupy the land. This speaks of the level of poverty in the area. If the area is so fertile and rich as stated by the Bishop and Mr. Jayaseelan, why should people occupy Government

ity, get electricity connection for them from the Government free of charge. Ask the authorities to provide a guaranteed number of jobs for people in the area. That is how other civic leaders have negotiated on their people's behalf, to enable investments into their area for broader national benefits and specific benefits to individuals affected.

As Mr. Jayaseelan points out, it is precisely to provide the thousands (not, millions) of families who are without electricity, that a portion of the electricity from this power plant will be used. Mr. Jayaseelan and the Bishop should be aware that there are at least 1.2 million (not a few thousands) families in the country with no electricity at home. The other portion of the electricity produced will be used to accelerate industrial growth, to provide jobs to the people all over the country. Neither is possible when a generation of people who enjoyed cheap hydroelectricity by displacing thousands, are blocking the development of power plants for the benefit of the

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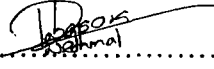
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