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# Engineers let off steam

## Good Friday attack on Bishop for blocking Norochcholai project

By Munza Mushtaq

Top electricity engineers said yesterday the current power crisis and the longest blackouts in Sri Lanka's history were largely manmade and they insisted the country had no option but to go in a big way for coal.

Ceylon Electricity Board Engineer's Union President Susantha Perera addressing a news conference blamed Chilaw's Bishop especially for blocking the Norochcholai coal power plant and thereby causing serious damage to national interest.

"Why let a Bishop or any other dignitary or leader hold the country to ransom?", he told the news conference held by the Institute of Engineers in Colombo.

Energy consultant Tilak Siyambalapitiya also called upon the government to take a strong stand and an immediate decision to go ahead with the coal plant without wavering and going from site to site.

"The government should not jump from place to place looking for a suitable location for the plant because we need all the locations already identified and studied, Norochcholai, Trincomalee, Mawella and Hambantota," he said.

Dr. Siyambalapitiya said the commissioning of several power plants within the next 12 months was not the solution to the crisis.

"Commissioning of a 50 MW or 100 MW plant will not solve the crisis. It can only be solved through a long term plan such as the coal option," he stressed. The institute's president B. R. O. Fernando said coal would stabilise electricity prices and ensure a reliable supply of power. He said that since 1985, successive administrations of the CEB on instructions of the government

### Power crisis

in office had delayed this project by shifting the site from Trincomalee to Mawella and then to Norochcholai, he said.

"The cries of engineers backed by systematic engineering and economic analysis, have been brushed aside by successive governments, to accommodate unreasonable demands from political, social, religious and business interests and pressure groups. As a result, our country has been deprived of a reliable, low cost source of electricity", he said.

Mr. Fernando said the Institute of Engineers was strongly of the view that the power crises of the past, present and future were all man-made.

"The high electricity rates too, are therefore man-made. This country has been subject to blackouts for nine months now, the longest in our history. Even after such long and painful experiences of the consequences of not implementing long term generation expansion plans, vital power projects are being repeatedly delayed", he charged.

Mr. Fernando defending CEB engineers said they could not be blamed for the coal plant project being stalled.

"Although the plans are made by the engineers, it is the government which should implement the coal plant. If the government says no, the engineers have no say after that," he said.

The engineers voicing their concerns about the recent tariff increase by the CEB said the average cost of a unit of electricity would now be Rs. 8 and could shoot up to Rs. 12 before long, if the coal option was not implemented as the cost of fuel would increase daily.