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27th Dec. 2001 Island

Karu, beware of CEB plann

I write with regard to the announcement made by the Minister of Power and Energy Karu Jayasuriya that a solution to the current power crisis will be made within the next 180 days. He has asked the public to bear with the Minister and that there will be no power cuts thereafter. Although we have heard such promises before, we are much encouraged by the prompt action the Minister has taken in addressing the current electricity problem.

However, it is sad to note that once again the new Minister is being guided by the same old logic and practices advocated by the CEB higher engineers who have been the brains behind the generation planning that crippled the last government's efforts in evolving a solution.

In misguiding the previous government, a high ranking CEB official required priority to be placed on diesel generation that has led to the current power crisis.

While qualified and knowledgeable engineers at the CEB were allocated menial responsibilities the devious power planners set to work in making generation plans with vested interests.

The very insistence that generation planning should be based on the use of diesel, opposed to the pursuit of coal, dislodged the importance and priority that was placed with regard to coal.

These advocates who were engaged as the heads of the CEB who were responsible for the purchase of the first gas turbines sets installed at Kelanitissa that led to the first power cuts in this country. They were also responsible for the subsequent purchase by the CEB of diesel generators for the Sapugaskanda 80 MW Power Station. The same company supplied the faulty locomotives to the Railways. These officials now once again engaged as top brass within the Ministry of Power and Energy.

The plans prepared by a top-level official made the CEB depend heavily on diesel to generate electricity. This in turn suppressed the development of a coal power station resulting in the CEB spending its entire income on purchasing diesel from the CPC. The result of such activity is reflected in the financial records of the CEB that were announced by the Minister that shows a deficit of 11 billion Rupees. It is curious to note that such a deficit represent almost half the cost of a coal power station.

Long-term generation planning within the CEB was deliberately based on the installation of gas turbines advocated as a quick fix to meet the increase in power demand while the CEB failed to advertise internationally to purchase gas turbines the very same power planners compiled a short list of favoured suppliers and restricted quotations to a selected few manufacturers.

Although the inquiries were based on the installation of two or more machines a manipulation by CEB engineers resulted in the purchase of redundant gas turbine manufactured by the famous Italian car maker, Fiat.

Point of View

By D. H. Jayasekera

This machine with an unplanned capacity of 115 MW was oversized for the distribution system at that time. Fortunately for the CEB system, and quite unfortunately for we, the consumers this gas turbine has malfunctioned whenever it was operated. This machine that has been designed to operate on gas and has a mechanical deficiency was palmed-off to the CEB. The efforts of the power station engineers to have this machine running required additional funds of the CEB to be utilised adding to the Rs. 11 billion overdraft currently obtained by the CEB. While this gas turbine was inaugurated by the President in August 1997, it has failed to generate electricity to its rated output.

Not being satisfied with one failure the long-term generation plan of the CEB was manipulated to accommodate the installation of two more gas based power projects under the proposed 150 MW combined cycle plants of which the first plant was commissioned just prior to the last general election.

The fuel bills for operating this machine is yet to impact on the Rs. 11 billion loss announced by the Minister. In spite of commissioning such costly installations, we are still left in the dark and subjected to ongoing power cuts.

Under the same generating plans the second combined cycle plant with a capacity of 150 MW is now being erected and is expected to be commissioned within the coming year.

This development will produce electricity once again with the burning of expensive diesel and by next Christmas we could expect the Minister to make an announcement that Rs. 11 billion loss at the CEB could have increased to more than Rs 20 billion.

Who are these power planners? Whose plans resulted in this 11 billion-Rupee loss at the CEB?

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