Prepare for power cuts up to the year 2011 and beyond

A friend of mine in Sri Lanka faxed me an advertisement, which has appeared in the Sri Lankan newspapers last weekend. This advertisement calls for Expressions of Interest for the supply of 3 x 350 MW Power Plants on a BOO basis to be commissioned in three stages up to the year 2011. After seeing this advertisement I can assure my friends in Sri Lanka to expect longer duration power cuts even beyond year 2011.

The advertisement published by the Sri Lankan Treasury calls for any one to use any fuel and supply three 350 MW power plants, one each in the year 2004, 2007 and 2011 respectively. This is like calling tenders to purchase dry chillies from the Pettah Merchants.

I am sure that the Treasury boys have prepared this advertisement after a late night sojourn in the nearby BOI approved night club.

Any country, for that matter even in the portion of Afghanistan ruled by the Taliban, will have a long-term generation plan. Long-term generation plan is an essential feature for a developing country like Sri Lanka, which has no other natural resource for generating power other than hydro.

The long term generation planning is a complex exercise where local expertise of the likes of Dr. Susantha Perera, who is the only person in Sri Lanka with a PhD in power economics and Prof. Rohan Lucas, a power system expert are essential. This is a continuous process. Modern software for this work may well cost several millions. The Treasury boys will have to be congratulated for doing this work at no cost. Perhaps they should be recommended for inclusion in the Guinness Book of World Records. But God save the people of Sri Lanka who will have to suffer long duration power cuts even beyond 2011.

Even when a small generator of 1 MW is connected to the National Grid it is a complex process. Unless it is done in a planned manner the whole system may collapse with damages to the consumers' equipment. It is not like connecting a 1000 watt electric kettle in the treasury canteen to prepare tea for the treasury boys who do generation planning in Sri Lanka.

Choosing the right type of fuel for the particular year and the fuel mix is not an easy task, as the treasury boys seem to think. Although any generation plan summary is just one page document, it has considered thousands of options to give the most economical benefit to the country.

The treasury boys together with the blue-eyed boys of BOI have already messed up the Sri Lankan power sector since 1996, and the people of Sri Lanka are now forced to enjoy eight hours power cuts every day as a consequence. If they are permitted to continue in the same fashion the country will have to face power cuts for decades beyond 2011.

The Treasury and the BOI men, if they have an iota of love for the country should leave the power sector affairs to be managed by competent people of CEB and other institutions with the necessary knowledge and experience in such matter.

Kapila Nanayakkara
Hydropower Generation Consultant, Australia.
Formerly Chief Engineer, Mahaweli Complex, CEB

19th Oct 2001 Island.