

Take up Mawella coal power project

This is to clarify some misguided conceptions about Mawella and Norachcholai raised in *The Island* (25.1.2001) by Mr. Gadarachchi commenting on my article titled 'Mawella Coal Power crucial for Southern Development' in *The Island* on 5.1.2001.

Mr. G advocates that we all should pressurize the Government to have the coal power plant at Norachcholai irrespective of personnel feelings, politics and religious objections and save the country from economic disaster. It is correct that coal power is essential to save the country from an economic disaster, but it most certainly should not be at Norachcholai in the Kalpitiya sea.

As power development consultant to the CEB, I have been against the Norachcholai Project since it was shifted there by the CEB in 1993. My objection was mainly on security grounds. The main task involved is setting up a coal power plant fuelled with imported coal. That is the chief reason why Trincomalee with its natural harbour facility was first selected for the coal power project. Next to Trinco it is Mawella/Kudawella where an excellent natural harbour facility is available to handle 60,000 dwt coal ships just by the shore.

On the other hand Kalpitiya sea is shallow and the ships have to anchor about 4 km out in the sea. From there a long trestle pier to transport coal to the shore is necessary. This pier in the Kalpitiya sea is dangerously exposed to

a suicide bombing attack. It can never be protected 24 hours a day by checking all the boats which will pass through this pier. This pier is the life line of the power plant and once that gets knocked out the power station will stand with a majestic look without coal supplies, and thus unable to generate power.

Moreover coal can be unloaded in the open sea only for eight unpredictable months in the year due to monsoon winds. The CEB should be prepared to pay demurrage for the periods coal unloading is held up, because of unfavourable weather. In addition other civil engineering problems exist in Norachcholai as water is scarce there and desalination has to be resorted to. On the other hand there are no such problems at Mawella. Those who promote Norachcholai are advised to read my article in *The Island* 'Coal power, yes - but not a dead plant' (6.9.1999) and security of Norachcholai not to be Ridiculed (12.8.2000). It is on this security issue the Government rightly cancelled Norachcholai for the project.

It is correct coal power was taken up on my initiative and I have been working on these projects since the late 1970's. Consequently I do not want to see a dead plant standing like a monument. In my long engineering career I have never faced such a disgusting situation arising over the construction of a power plant. Anti coal poison was introduced into the minds of the people in the 1980's by NARA when Trincomalee was taken up for the coal power project

when NARA's oyster culture project at Snug Cove was ordered to be moved out for the purpose of implementing the coal power project by President J. R. Jayewardene.

Mr. G says that the Government has abandoned the coal power project at Mawella and now a fisheries harbour has been set in the Kudawella bay where the coal power jetty is planned to be set up. It is not so. It was because of the organised protests started by anti social elements at that time, that President Premadasa ordered that work on Mawella be stopped and an alternative site looked for.

If a fisheries harbour has been constructed in the Kudawella bay it has to be removed for the greater good of the nation. Coal power is base load power required to operate factories and provide employment to meet the needs of a 20 million population. For all I know this fisheries harbour is not in the Kudawella bay but westwards in the Nilwela bay adjoining Kudawella bay where coal supplies will be unloaded.

Mr. G has put forward this amusing argument - "It is unbelievable that such a knowledgeable person (referring to me) talks of development of the South by having a coal power plant there when electricity generated from any other place be it Norachcholai could be transmitted." One of the important priorities of the government is the development of the neglected South where two deadly insurrections had arisen. For the past 15 years or so attempts made by

both the UNP and PA in this direction have failed miserably.

I have been stressing the fact that the two basic requirements for development are water and power. But the plans drawn up to meet these requirements - Kaluganga diversion to the south and the Mawella coal power plant were sabotaged by the enemy within. It is in this context I have drawn the attention of Mr. Ronnie 'de Mel, Minister of Southern Development and not to tickle the ego of the minister.

Let us see how southern development will fare power-wise with a coal power plant at Norachcholai vs one at Mawella. Coal ships from Australia will have to pass Mawella and travel all the way to Norachcholai. From there electricity produced will have to be transmitted back to the south through a 300 - 400 km long transmission line. The CEB transmission experts should be able to calculate the cost of the line and the losses in transmission. This is a case of 'Parangia Kotte Giya.' On the other hand with a power plant at Mawella coal ships can come straight to Mawella and from here power will be directly distributed to the region.

I suppose what I have stated here is clear for public understanding, so that they will not be misled by false statements and worthless SECURITY guarantees.

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