

26/02/02 Island

Coal power to the rescue ... but location not decided yet – Minister

By Himangi Jayasundere

The government is to once again resort to coal power in its efforts to solve the power crisis.

Minister of Power and Energy Karu Jayasuriya recently said that the government proposed to set up a 300 MW coal fired power project. However contrary to previous efforts the latest project will be handed over to the private sector. "We haven't decided on a venue yet but it will be Norochcholai, Hambantota or Trincomalee" the minister said. A period of 5-6 years would be required for the completion of the project he added.

In the midst of the power crisis in September last year the then Minister of Power and Energy, Anuruddha Ratwatte levelled a finger directly at those who led the campaign against the Norochcholai coal power plant for the power crisis. He claimed that if not for the adamant opposition, the PA government would have gone ahead with the project and completed the first phase by December 2000 which would have resulted in the generation of 300 MW to the national grid. However under the

prevalent conditions the government would have to re-negotiate for fresh aid from Japan he said, at the time.

Japan withdrew its funds following a spate of protests that emerged against the proposal to set up the Norochcholai coal fired power plant.

The Bishop of Chilaw was in the forefront of the campaign against the setting up of the coal plant in 1994 while environmentalists and even members of the UNP were elements in the strong campaign. A main concern raised by protesters was environment pollution.

Two previous efforts by the UNP government in the late eighties and early nineties to set up coal power plants in Trincomalee and Mawella failed mainly due to protests ignited by environmental concerns. While the proposal to set up a coal power plant in Trincomalee failed partly due to security concerns, the proposed plant in Mawella in the south, failed when strong anti coal propaganda resulted in President Premadasa ordering the CEB to suspend further studies in Mawella.