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Norachcholai coal blows hot

By Shelani de Silva

The on-and-off controversy over the proposed Norachcholai power plant is hotting up again with both sides firing fresh salvos.

Government ministers and CEB officials have again stressed the need to go ahead with the project but Chilaw's Bishop Frank Marcus Fernando who is leading the protest campaign has reiterated the strong opposition of the Church and the people of Chilaw.

Amidst the dispute, President Kumaratunga had last year directed that the project be reviewed. But Power and Energy Minister Anurudhdha Ratwatte and Deputy Minister

Felix Perera told Parliament recently there was an urgent need for alternative sources of energy and the project should be implemented.

Bishop Marcus referring to the Minister's statement said he hoped the country was having a government where the right hand did not know what the left hand was doing.

CEB officials said funding by the Japanese Government for the power project remained open despite the disputes and delays.

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The coal power station at Norachcholai, Puttalam

Almost all professional opinion is that without a coal fired power plant we will face power shortages by 2004. We are already late as the lead period for the construction of such a plant is at least five years.

The feasibility and engineering studies for the plant at Norachcholai have already been completed, the Environmental Impact Assessment has been carried out, gazetted and approved. Generous arrangements have been made for relocation of the less than half a dozen families involved.

As coal is the cheapest source of power with long term guaranteed reserves, most countries

around the world are going for coal power. The technology is now well advanced to minimise environmental effects.

If the coal power station is not constructed the entire economic programme of the country will be derailed and therefore it is incumbent on those who are protesting to put country above self and assist the authorities to make an immediate start on the project at the Norachcholai site.

It may be pertinent to investigate whether the LTTE plays any role in this protest campaign as part of its campaign of economic sabotage in the country.

Tudor Munasinghe
Nawala