

# Energy usage and extra cool government offices

The global downturn in demand, and the resultant decline in revenue has prompted many export companies in Sri Lanka to reduce costs and improve productivity. One initiative implemented widely is switching off air-conditioning totally, or during certain times, and/or adjusting the thermostats to a higher temperature. I have personally experienced this recently where in one company we had a meeting in the Board room and the AC was switched off. The host apologized that their new policy is to switch on AC only at 10.30 am. In another office the meeting was held in the meeting room without any AC at all and there was no apology, because it was normal practice.

In a totally opposite manner, the Government offices continue to have their ACs on all the time at a very cold temperature setting. Very often I have complained that I am "freezing". Obviously they do not have to earn money in order to spend money, but use the full budgetary allocation. The hotels are even worse offenders. Many foreigners complain that Sri Lanka hotels are some of the coldest in the world. The Japanese apparently feel it the most, judging by their surprise at the temperature setting in Sri Lanka hotels. The Japanese obviously feel it because of their new "cool biz" policy where thermostats have to be set to 26 degrees Celsius in summer, and they have given up wearing suits to office in summer. This is not mandatory in Japan and is just a



The hotels are even worse offenders Many foreigners complain that Sri Lankan hotels are some of the coldest in the world.

recommendation by the Government for voluntary adoption. Although many smaller companies in Japan seem to ignore this recommendation, the larger ones consider it responsible behaviour to set their thermostats to 26 degrees. In fact last summer when I visited a Hitachi plant in Japan, the waiting room had a notice about the cool biz policy prominently displayed, lest visitors would wonder what has

happened to the air-conditioning.

We could save a colossal amount of foreign exchange if the Government "recommends" setting of air-conditioning to at least 24 degrees if 26 degrees is not acceptable. I have set mine to 26 degrees and I feel quite comfortable.

Sunil G Wijesinha  
Colombo 5

# LNG Power Plant Controversy

I am happy that a very useful debate is going on currently in *The Island*, with regard to the proposed installation of an LNG Power plant in Sri Lanka. Engineer O. S. Perera has indicated that the first stage of this Project "Was expected to be around US dollars 600 million" ie. around Rs. 65 billion. Any entrepreneur who invests such a colossal sum, will try to recover the investment in the shortest possible time, with a large profit. This payment has to be ultimately made by the already overburdened people of this country. Therefore it is absolutely necessary, that a Power Project that is most beneficial to the country is selected after careful consideration of all relevant factors involved. Engineer O. S. Perera states *inter alia*, in his article that appeared in the *Island* of 29th June: "According to what was reported to the media, the LNG plant is being offered without any of these capacity related charges. As the project is associated with a respected Buddhist priest, I was constrained to believe that the statement was truthful. If it is the case, then the entire plant comes as a gift to the people of Sri Lanka and there is no room for anyone to grudge that including the planning engineers of the CEB." We should not look a gift horse in the mouth, but I simply cannot believe that the entire plant comes as a gift to the people of Sri Lanka.

Having seen several private power plant project proposals, I am aware that sometimes there are several "hidden clauses," which more than cover up for the apparent concessionary terms offered, and we should be wary of clauses in "small print" as indicated by Engineer M.V.R. Perera. Engineer O. S. Perera also states: "I have no doubt that the Minister of power and energy who is well experienced in such matters would not fall into such traps". I disagree with this statement, as I think that the Minister himself will agree, that he does not have the expertise or the experience to pass judgment on the feasibility of any Power Project, and more so, on a project that is to be introduced for the first time in Sri Lanka.

A proposal of this nature must be studied in depth, first by the specialists of this country, and only if these specialists are satisfied that the project is technically and financially feasible, should international tenders be called. It is a damning indictment on the ability of our engineers and scientists, that their considered advice is not sought on a matter that has far reaching consequences for the country.

In his article titled "Proposals for natural gas power plants" which appeared in *The Island* of the 29th June, Dr Janaka Ratnasiri (Dr JR) has made reference to my article on the same subject. I do not for a moment say that the Long Term Generation Plan

(LTGP) is the last word in Generation planning and that is why I had suggested that the advice of experts in this field, such as Prof. K. K. Y. W. Perera and Dr Tilak Siyambalapitiya should be obtained. However the LTGP is the only document available to the public where a detailed study has been made by CEB Engineers of the Generation Planning Branch who have been specially selected for their expertise in this field and who alone are privy to a whole heap of data that no other individual or organisation has. My reference that "LNG proposals had not been included for obvious reasons" meant that the Planning Engineers of the C.E.B. had come to the conclusion that it was not economically feasible. As I have stated, the LTGP is updated every year, and new technology and fluctuation of fuel prices etc. in the world market are taken into account among many other factors. There is no doubt in my mind that environmental factors have to be taken into account when considering power projects. No power project could be carried out in this country without the approval of the Central Environmental Authority, and if the CEB has not carried out the recommendations of the CEA they should be taken to task.

Dr JR also states: "One bone of contention has been apparently that the project has been an unsolicited one. If that is the case, the best the Ministry could do is to call for proposals internationally from reputed suppliers of thermal power plants keeping the fuel option open. If the government receives proposals for both Coal and LNG plants, it could judge for itself what is more economical and go ahead with it. The evaluation however needs to consider the overall situation including environmental factors and should be done by impartial professionals not allergic to modern technology."

I am one hundred percent in agreement with the above statement and I hope the Ministry will change its present course.

I browsed the internet and I found that in the USA, in the year 2008, the generation of electricity using Coal was 49.7 percent, using Natural Gas - 17 percent and Nuclear - 19.3 percent.

In conclusion, I wish to state that I am intrigued by the fact that both the Institution of Engineers Sri Lanka and the Engineers Union of the CEB have been silent spectators, on an issue that is very relevant to their profession, and which is of paramount importance to the country. I hope that they will come out of their shell and indicate their views to the public. The Ministry itself must come clean and inform the public as to what is going on. WE HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW.

Neil Perera

# Would Prabhakaran have bitten his mother's ear?

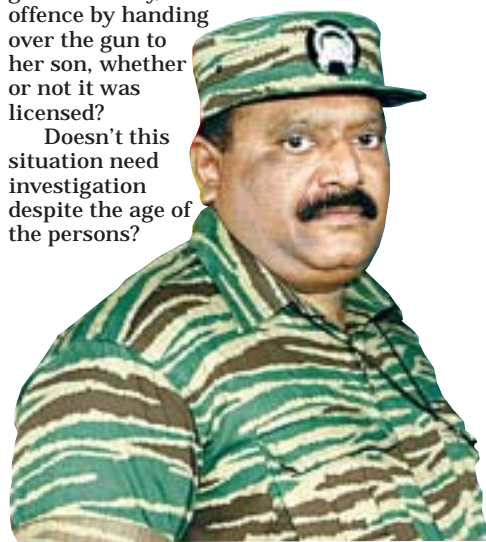
I fully endorse the views expressed by my friend and former classmate, Somapala Gunadheera (SG) published in *The Island* of the 30 June 2009 on the "Captain Ali" affair.

However, regarding the application of the 'Dhammapada' to the situation of Prabhakaran's aged parents being in custody, as referred to in the last para, and also brought up by SG in a previous letter, I have some reservations.

I also have great respect for the sayings in Dhammapada, but here we are confronted with two individuals whose role may need close investigation as to whether or not they had played any role in encouraging, aiding and abetting Prabhakaran's criminal deeds. At least, in respect of Prabhakaran's mother, it is on record that Prabhakaran had told an Indian journalist that he possessed two revolvers, one of which was given to him by his mother purchased for Rs.150 by her, which he treasured more. If so, were they a pistol packing family?

Doesn't that raise two questions? Firstly, did Mrs. Velupillai hold a license to possess a gun? Secondly, hasn't she committed an offence by handing over the gun to her son, whether or not it was licensed?

Doesn't this situation need investigation despite the age of the persons?



Bandu de Silva

# SCOPP: Clarification

I write with reference to your article on SCOPP. I should note that I did not say that there was now no need for the institution, since I believe an institution that promotes capacity and opportunities for all, responsible directly to His Excellency the President, could play a very useful role. This is the more important in the context of current rehabilitation needs.

What I noted to your reporter is that I could understand the argument that a specific institute for peace was not essential, since SCOPP was originally set up for negotiations which stopped some

time back, and the APRC which we have been facilitating is due to report soon. Besides, all branches of government are now contributing to the perpetuation of peace through initiatives such as the Northern and the Eastern revivals and other programmes to promote equity and sustainable development.

I made no comment myself as to my continuing as Secretary of a Ministry. It would have been inappropriate to do so in a context in which the future employment of some of my colleagues is in doubt.

Rajiva Wijesinha

# Into the valley of baboons

It would seem that disagreeing with Izeth Hussain is an offence punishable by deportation. As he pointed out in his charming letter of June 22nd entitled 'Go home, Kath', I devoted one paragraph of my last article to his comments on the Human Rights Council vote.

My suggestion that he might offer to hold David Miliband's bag while he gave Sri Lanka a good slap wasn't based on some general impression that Izeth Hussain is a great fan. I was pointing out that the effort to hold a Special Session wasn't based on good intentions and that it wasn't reasonable of David Miliband to expect genocide, as Izeth Hussain claimed in his piece. If the Sri Lankan delegation had worked from such a generous assumption, they might well have lost.

While there may be people who believe that criticising anything said by a Muslim is tantamount to Islamophobia, I hope that they are not many in number. As for being consumed by demented rage and hatred, or whatever it was that Izeth Hussain's imagination dreamt up, nothing could be further from the truth. In his rather more circumspect letter of June 24th entitled 'Megaphone diplomacy', for the measured tone of which I should probably thank Demos, he suggests that I might just be silly. The same could be true of him, of course. Let the readers judge for themselves.

If Izeth Hussain would like to press on with his campaign for my removal from the country, I should point out that the Immigration Department has recently set up a hotline for people to report undesirable foreigners. If he can't locate the number, perhaps it would be almost as convenient to send a white van.

Kath Noble



Miliband: 'My suggestion that he might offer to hold David Miliband's bag while he gave Sri Lanka a good slap wasn't based on some general impression that Izeth Hussain is a great fan.'

# Marleen had close rapport with members of the Lankan community

The whole Sri Lanka community, members of the diplomatic corps and well-wishers of Sri Lanka deeply mourn the death of Ambassador, Abdul Aged Mohamed Marleen, 73, who passed away peacefully while attending a conference in Sanaa Tuesday.

His sudden demise sent shock waves to Sri Lankans living both in Saudi Arabia as well as those in the motherland. As a mark of respect, the Sri Lankan community members in Riyadh and Jeddah held condolence meetings at the Sri Lankan embassy in Riyadh as well as in the consulate in Jeddah. Sri Lankan Embassy here has opened a condolence book which will be open till Tuesday June 30

As a journalist, I had the opportunity of associating with him closely ever since he took up his assignment in Riyadh in March last year. He had a close rapport with the members of the Sri Lankan community irrespective of race or religion. He found his time to listen to the weary tales of distressed housemaids and also to meet members of the Royal family and senior government officials to project the image of Sri Lanka in this part of the world. His effective influence helped resolve several differences among the members of the various ethnic communities.

Foreign Minister Rohitha

Bogollagama said: "The late Ambassador served Sri Lanka with great distinction as our envoy in Saudi Arabia and was a highly respected and a much loved personality, both among his colleagues in the diplomatic fraternity in Riyadh, as well as the 550,000 strong Sri Lankan expatriate community in the Kingdom.

Among his initiatives to promote Sri Lanka's image in the Kingdom was the launch of a highly informative and colourful



Marleen

## Appreciation

monthly by the Embassy, dubbed "Insight", in June last year, with the help and support of the Sri Lankan community. He made significant endeavours to build bridges between the two countries and the peoples. Only last month, Ambassador Marleen founded the Sri Lanka-Saudi Arabia Friendship Society.

He gave a new look to the embassy premises, the outer area of the mission was beautifully landscaped with the help of Lankan philanthropists

and made a special sitting area for the visitors with facilities to avail themselves for a cup of typical Sri Lankan tea. He also installed a wide screen television to highlight the tourist destinations through a documentary *Faces and Places*, filmed in Sri Lanka recently on his own initiative.

Marleen, who assumed duties here in March last year, was an eminent Colombo-based lawyer, who has been in active practice for 40 years.

Marleen was bestowed with the post of President's Counsel in 2001, an honour conferred on outstanding legal men. Since 1991 he has been the president of the Moors Islamic Cultural Home (MICH) and secretary general of the Cairo-based Afro-Asian Solidarity Association. He has also officiated as the chairman of the Board of Management of Zahira College in Colombo, which is the premier Islamic educational institution in the country's capital. He was also the founder member of the SLFP Lawyers Association.

Marleen went to Sanaa on Sunday and I met him on Saturday with a Saudi businessman who wanted to visit Sri Lanka with his family on a holiday. I was really amazed at the manner he treated the Saudi gentleman showing our traditional Sri Lankan hospitality. He saw that the entry visa was issued in 10 minutes

while we were having discussions. He offered us tea and he presented the visitor with three packets of tea and told him to come again to the mission when he finishes the tea given to him.

Marleen possessed sterling qualities of an ambassador, he was kind, gentle, sincere devoted to his profession and understood the qualities of the common man. Although his death had caused a great vacuum in the annals of the Sri Lankans living in the Kingdom, Ambassador Marleen will be remembered for ever for the yeoman services he rendered to the community here.

I salute him for the sentiments he had towards the community and efforts he made to project Sri Lanka as a country full of potential.

Thank You Sir for all what you did to us and we will always remember you in our prayers.

Marleen is survived by his wife, and son Eng. Shahrin in San Francisco and three daughters - doctors Sheroon in Brisbane, Shezoon and Shemoun in London. His Janaza took place in Jawatte Burial Grounds on Friday before the Jumma prayers. May the Almighty grant him Him Jenna for his good services.

Mohammed Rasooldeen  
Editor,  
Arab News, Riyadh