

Demonstration against Upper Kotmale Hydro-project held in Colombo

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More than two hundred activists belonging to civil groups opposed to Upper Kotmale Hydro-power scheme demonstrated in front of Colombo Fort Railway station Friday afternoon, sources in Colombo said. Members of leftist political parties and other related civil groups including Sinhalese and Tamils participated in the demonstration. Upcountry Tamil political parties did not attend the demonstration.



Demonstrants, People's Campaign Against Upper-Kotmale Project

Sri Lanka Government says the scheme will produce nearly 150 MW electric power capacity to the grid which is struggling to meet the increasing electric power demands of consumers and industrial infrastructure of Sri Lanka.

Mr Thambiah, an opponent of the Upper Kotmale scheme who has taken the fight to the national level, estimates that nearly 470 families may lose their homes if the project is implemented. He also fears that the area renowned for its scenic beauty will face environmental disaster. Mr Thambiah says that the scheme will benefit only the Japanese Government and powerful businessmen. Estate workers stand to lose by this scheme, he adds.

"We successfully organized a demonstration in the upcountry on May 15. But the government did not take notice of that. Now we have organized another demonstration in Colombo. We would be holding demonstration in every district. All communities are participating in our struggle contrary to the government's stand that we are communal," said Mr. Thambiah.

Mr. Kingsley Thomas, a worker participated in the Colombo demonstration said, "Four dams have been constructed in the Nuwara Eliya district. About six hundred upcountry families rendered homeless when the Lower Kotmale project was implemented have not been given alternate lands until now. We cannot allow upcountry workers to suffer any more."

Upper Kotmale is a 150 MW plant hydropower project proposed by Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) which is a Government Agency responsible for generation of electricity in Sri Lanka during the UNP government in 1987. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the project was submitted for approval of the Ministry of Irrigation Power and Energy in December 1994 and Central Environmental Authority was the concurrent agency. The project was approved in 1998.

The demand for electricity in Sri Lanka has been growing at an average annual rate of 8%. Dependence on costly thermal power was increased from 21% in 1990 to 35% in 2000. Power generation will need to be increased from 6,800 GWh in 2000 to about 15,000 GWh in 2013. The share of hydropower is expected to decrease to 32%. The balance will be met by thermal power generation.



Mr. E. Thambiah, representing People's Campaign Against Upper-Kotmale Project



Mr. Kingsley Thomas

