El Nino is here! How ready are we to face it?

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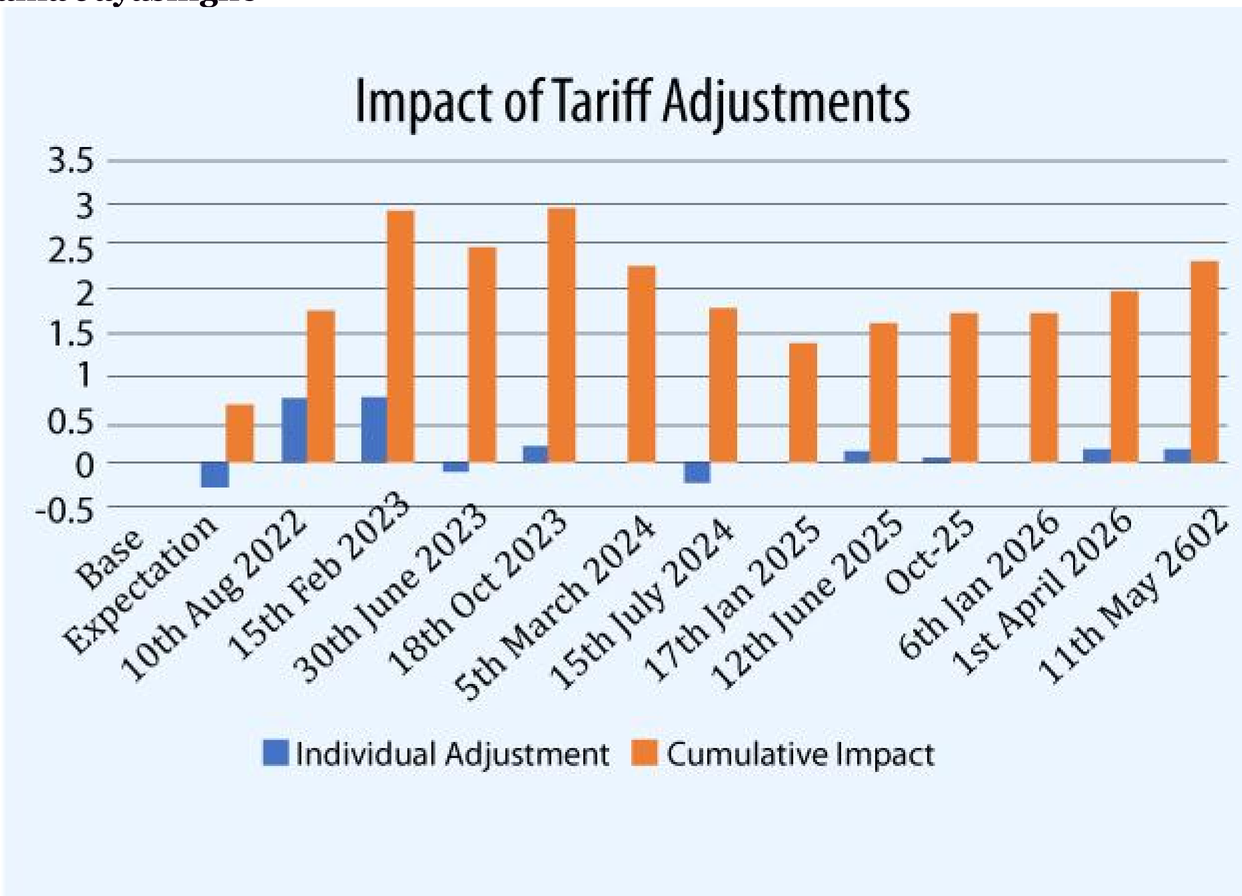
By Parakrama Jayasinghe



El Niño is here. It is now official. I don't think anyone in Sri Lanka would dare to deny it, like President Trump refusing to accept the existence of Climate Change and Global warming.

The recent pictures in the visual media of the Victoria Reservoir half full and many irrigation tanks running dry are adequate evidence even if we ignore the scorching heat. There is the fear of it being even a super El Niño.

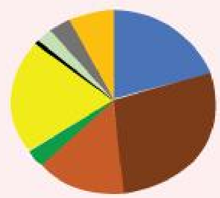
Energy sector and food

However, by and large the feeling that an ordinary citizen gets is that there is hardly any preparedness. The concerns of the electricity consumers of the possible critical times not far in the future are

DAILY NET ELECTRICITY GENERATION

Date: Monday, July 27, 2026

Total Net Energy	58.77 GWh3017.1 MW	Peak Demand	3017.0 MW
Renewable	29.37 GWh (49.98%)1510.1 MW (50.1%)	Renewable	1510.1 MW (50.1%)
Fossil Fuel	29.40 GWh (50.02%)1506.9 MW (49.9%)	Fossil Fuel	1506.8MW(49.9%)



CEB Hydro	11.73 GWH
CEB Themal	16.79 GWH
CEB Thermal Oil	8.37 Gwh
CEB Wind	1.64 Gwh
SPP Solar	11.98 Gwh
SPP Biomass	0.3 Gwh
SPP Minhiydo	1.53 Gwh
SPP Wind	2.19 Gwh
IPP Thermal Oil	4.23 Gwh

Total Net Energy	58.77 GWh
Auxiliary Consumption	2.16 GWh
Total Gross Energy	60.93 GWh

Cost of generation - fossil fuel vs renewables

Year	RE Generation (%)	Fossil Fuels Cost (Rs/kWh)	Renewables Cost (Rs/kWh)	Overall Avg Cost (Rs/kWh)
2021	46%	16.70	5.69	11.47
2022	50%	39.87	6.46	23.00
2023	48%	48.80	8.11	29.17
2024	51%	31.91	8.18	19.81
2025	46%	32.53	8.83	21.53

Based on 2025 Q 1 data

intensified.

It is reported that one unit at the Lak Vijaya Coal Power Plant is now shut down. Whether this has been prompted by the issue of substandard coal is not known. But the worse news is the drastic reduction of the contribution by major hydro and mini hydro resources for electricity supply. Sadly, this gap is being filled by the most expensive diesel-based power, in a situation where the price of oil is again on the way up.

This is seen in the daily electricity generation mix for July 27, 2026. (CEB.lk) with the contribution of renewable energy below 50% and oil providing over 20%. This should be compared with the mix of the corresponding period last year to see the sharp deterioration of the options for Sri Lanka.

No wonder that the National System Operator was compelled to seek two increases in Consumer Tariff on April 1, 2026 and May 11, 2026.

The reality on the ground

The deterioration of the generation mix between two similar working days from 2025 to 2026 shown below is noteworthy.

The RE contribution has dwindled to only 36%. Along with the deterioration of the energy mix another significant aspect is the increased demand for electricity obviously caused by the increased increase in ambient temperature and dry weather, which nevertheless have to be met by the Utility.

What is uppermost in the minds of all levels of consumers is the ever-increasing cost of electricity, of which they now need more to face the unbearable weather. The reality since the debacle in 2022, which was also caused by the untrammeled use of oil for power generation even diverting the scant supplies which should have been reserved for transport shown below, is not pleasant viewing.

Renewables

In this background, perhaps it is not widely known that we have managed to stay even at these levels of consumer tariff, due to the significant amount of renewable energy-based power generation we have harnessed over the years. The data over the past years from the CEB illustrates this situation.

It is indeed unfortunate that this reality does not seem to enter the planning of the energy supply in recent times, with the contribution of RE continuing to dwindle, instead of improving towards the much talked about 70%.

In this critical stage when the decisions have been taken out of our hands, with galloping world oil prices and the deteriorating parity rate, which makes matters worse, it is time that someone in authority and more importantly with minimal wisdom, takes a close look at what needs to be done most urgently, if we are even to survive with present level of energy supplies and costs to the consumers.

Some signs of hope

The declaration of the "Appointed Date" on March 9, 2026, ensured that the new Electricity Act No 36 of 2024 (as amended) is in effect now. One major impact of this is that the responsibility of determining all electricity related tariffs, now lies firmly with the Public Utilities Commission (PUCSL). While the determination of the consumer tariff has been under their purview and was seen to be a transparent and consultative process, the determination of the levels of tariff payable for the developers of renewable energy, has caused much disappointment and despair.

The feeling among the developers of the large scale developers governed by the Feed in Tarriff System under the Sustainable Energy Authority as well as the "Prosumers" under the Surya Bala Sangraamaya for roof top solar PV development, lacked any kind of transparency and stakeholder consultation applied by the PUCSL.

This is the prime reason that the goal to achieve the much hoped for 70% contribution of RE is yet a distant hope, with those in the utility publicly confessing their incompetence to reach it. It is now hoped that with a degree of transparency and absence of personal biases and prejudices, paving the way for fair levels of tariff will also be available for the future for purchase of electricity, and thus augur well to enable the 70% RE goal to be reached in time.

"No more oil use by 2030"

The PUCSL held a widely attended stakeholder meeting on April 10, 2026, to discuss the immediate and logical future of the electricity sector, which was long overdue, and was well structured and well attended. (pucsl.gov.lk).

Evidently with the wide range of opinions of the stakeholders present, the PUCSL took the immediate next step of issuing a firm direction to the National System Operator (NSO) in response to their request for a further consumer tariff increase of 18% hot on the heels of the increase of 15% granted on April 1, that the requested tariff increase is granted only on the condition that the NSO, presently having the responsibility of preparing all future Long Term Electricity Generation Plans (LTEGP), shall include strategies to eliminate the use of all types of oil based power generation by 2030, with the intermediate stage of removal of use of diesel by 2027.

Achieving this target will automatically take Sri Lanka to the goal of 70% RE contribution by 2030. This is the only way we can hope to reverse the present disastrous trend of ever-increasing consumer tariff.

The sticking plaster remedies of granting subsidies to keep the low-end consumers happy cannot be sustained, and perhaps will not be permitted by the IMF, which insists that the Utility should recover all its costs. As such, the only way they can hope to do so is by adopting a more economical generation mix and not by forever using more fossil fuel.

How to get to zero oil

The PUCSL has not been content with the issue the direction to the NSO to plan for the zero oil target. The PUCSL has now embarked on the task of seeking stakeholder consultations and strategies on the ways and means of getting rid of oil.

The daily demand pattern available in the PUCSL web site clearly shows that the two critical problems at present are an excess of solar energy during the sunlight hours and the need to use large amounts of diesel to meet the peak hours' demand presently hovering around 3,000 MW with signs of increasing with the hot weather.

The great achievement made by the Suraya Bala Sangraamaya, which by any standard is a visionary and revolutionary step during a period of otherwise a most backward sector, immediately highlighted the way forward , once more with the contribution of the "Prosumers" presently amounting to over 150,000 electricity consumers, whose worth is at last recognized.

The larger ground-mounted solar PV and Wind power and mini hydro developers, mainly Sri Lankan too are available to make their contribution.

All these amounts to over 3,000 MW of renewable energy which deserve close attention to make optimal use of to rid Sri Lanka of the curse of imported fossil fuels.

The PUCSL has now proposed a Feed in Tariff System for export of solar and wind power stored in batteries during the day and accepted to the grid during the peak hours.

After several sessions of close stakeholder consultations, the final proposal was submitted for Public Consultation on July 22, 2026. It is hoped that after due consideration these BESS FIT systems would be publicly announced without delay in spite of saboteurs who wish to retain the status quo.

Will the obvious way forward be adopted or even permitted?
It does not take much intelligence to understand that the proposed BESS FIT system is the most feasible answer to the inevitable emerging crisis and does require only very minor state involvement. But the PUCSL has the mandate only to formulate and declare the tariff. The NSO, who pointedly avoided even attending the public consultation, has the responsibility to implement the system. Will any one of higher authority, who accepts the responsibility of the welfare of the economy in general and the welfare of the people, step in to ensure that this is done? My table above comparing the cost of generation between RE and fossil fuel is the only data needed to reach this decision.

However, as we have experienced time and again, Sri Lankans never get the benefit of the logical and favourable decisions. In this situation too we the citizens had better be prepared for such an eventuality. Fortunately, we now have such alternatives. I offer my advice to anyone interested to map out such alternatives in time.

The writer is an energy sector activist and Chartered Mechanical Engineer, holding a BSc Engineering (Hons) from the University of Peradeniya.