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UWI professor doubts viability of natural gas

published: Thursday | February 3, 2005

Dionne Rose, Staff Reporter

WHILE THE Jamaican Government presses ahead with its plans to set up a Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminal with its CARICOM partner, Trinidad and Tobago, Professor Al Binger of the University of the West Indies (UWI) is casting doubts on the viability of the project.

The director of the University of the West Indies Centre for Environment and Development (UWICED) is suggesting that the Government should instead explore another option, the Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion (OTEC), which is a technology used to generate electricity from different ocean temperatures.

This technology makes use of the difference in temperature between the warm surface water of the ocean and the cold water in depths below 2,000 feet to generate electricity.

Professor Binger told **The Gleaner**: "I think LNG is swapping monkey for black dog. Why put all that money in a resource that is not yours when you have a resource that is yours that you can make the same investment in?"

RISING PRICES

He further pointed out that the prices of LNG will keep rising and said that there are no guarantees that Jamaica will get a price concession. (Prime Minister P.J. Patterson told journalists last year that Trinidad will supply Jamaica with LNG at concessionary rates, despite the matter going to arbitration before the CCJ.)

Professor Binger made the comments at a press conference yesterday at the offices of the Ministry of Land and Environment on Half-Way Tree Road in Kingston while reporting on the outcome of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) international meeting which was held in Mauritius, an island in the Indian Ocean, east of Madagascar last month.

Pointing out the advantages of using OTEC, Professor Binger said that it offers the country an opportunity to utilise its natural resources. He however revealed that exploring this technology would be a costly venture. He said, "you can build a 10 megawatt of diesel facility and it will cost you \$25 million (but) if you get the same megawatt in OTEC it will cost you \$80 millions."

"In 15 years, you would pay off for the plant and the electricity is free," he added.

Dean Peart, minister of land and environment said that that the recommendations that were presented at Mauritius including OTEC as an alternative source of energy, were presented to Cabinet and that the ministry would also be meeting with the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) to look at the recommendations.

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