

News_MISC_2005-49.pdf

Sethusamudram project to go ahead amidst heavy protests

By Damitha Hemachandra

The foundation stone for the Rs. 24 billion Sethusamudram Shipping Canal Project (SSCP) linking India's East and West coast is to be laid today by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh amidst heavy protests from Coastal Action Network (CAN), a collection of NGOs and the Tamil Nadu Government.

CAN, which includes a collection of organisations and individuals varying from environmentalists, marine biologists to fisherman are fighting against the canal at courts while the Tamil Nadu Government had refused to grant mandatory environmental clearance to the project.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jeyaram Jayalalitha too is predicted to boycott the festival despite official invitation conveyed to her and representatives of her party.

Yet a Press Release issued by the Indian government informed that the Premier himself would be launching the SSCP, 145 years after it was first suggested by English Officer A.D. Taylor.

The project is predicted to cause great damage to the marine eco system in Gulf of Man-

nar, including the National Marine Biological Reserve, which houses 3600 species of plants and animals including number of important species of corals.

The whole area is biologically rich and is rated among the highly productive seas of the world. The coral reefs in the gulf houses nearly 750 fish varieties with nearly 800,000 fishermen from both countries being dependent on these fish resources.

The most far-fetched and the worst prediction had been made by, Tamil Human rights and Environmentalist group, Manitham.

Manitham in its interim report on SSCP had predicted that half of Jaffna peninsula and nearly 85 islands on the Western and North Western coasts of Sri Lanka and half of Rameswaram to go under sea if the Miocene era lime stone reef link between the Jaffna peninsula and Rameswaram is to be broken by dredging.

However Foreign Ministry sources said that the Sri Lankan government had not presented any formal opinion on the matter since the inter-ministerial committee appointed to investigate into the matter is yet to reach a final decision.