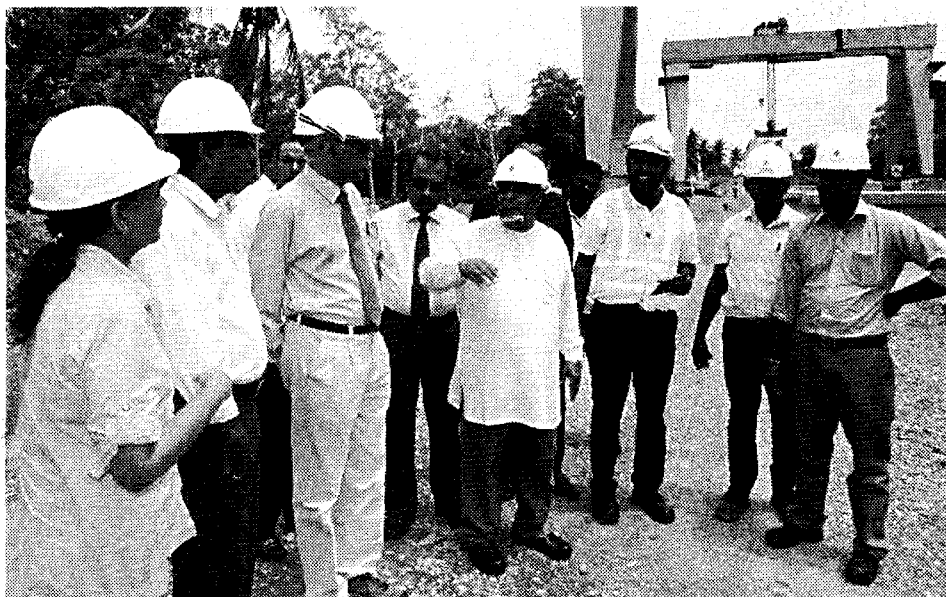


Railway extension deadline extended

By DASUN EDIRISINGHE



Transport and Civil Aviation Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva inspects the concrete beams site of the Matara-Beliatta railway line at Makavita. Secretary to the Ministry Nihal Somaweera, Project Director Jean Weerasuriya and officials from the Chinese and Sri Lanka chapters also present.

The deadline for the extension of the railway line from Matara to Beliatta has been extended to December 2017 as the contractors have failed to meet the scheduled deadline of July 31, 2016.

Following an inspection tour of the coastal railway line extension project at

Matara, Transport and Civil Aviation Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva said only 70% of the work had been completed so far.

He said the Matara-Beliatta stretch of the Matara-Kataragama railway extension project would be completed by

December 31 next year.

De Silva said the construction of the railway line had been delayed due to the change of government, but now it was being expedited.

The minister said the present government had decided to extend the line from Beliatta to Kataragama via Hambantota Port and Mattala Air Port.

"We will not stop this valuable project started by the previous government at Beliatta," De Silva said, adding that the present government had already held discussions with the Chinese government on funding for the Beliatta-Kataragama stretch.

He said the government had obtained USD 200 million as a loan from the Chinese Exim Bank at 2% interest for the project with a grace period of seven years. "Thereafter, we have to settle the loan within 13 years."

Minister Silva inspected the new bridge constructed across the Nilwala Ganga at Makavita and 615 metre long Sri Lanka's longest railway tunnel at Nakuttiyagama during his visit. The 26.7 km long Matara-Beliatta railway line has two tunnels, 12 bridges, four stations and two sub stations. Secretary to the Ministry Nihal Somaweera, Project Director Jean Weerasuriya and relevant officials from China and Sri Lanka accompanied the minister.

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