

## Government seeks apex court's nod to Sethusamundram project

The Union government Friday moved the Supreme Court seeking its permission to expeditiously complete a shorter navigational sea route around India's southern tip.

In an affidavit filed with the apex court's registry, the Union government pleaded to the court to suspend its August 31, 2007 order preventing it from damaging the Adam's Bridge or the mythological Ram Sethu between India's southern tip and Sri Lanka, while dredging it to build the sea route.

Staying clear of making any controversial remark in the affidavit, the government said the Ram Sethu or the Adam's bridge is not a man-made structure but a natural formation, and it was intending to dredge it for the Sethusamudram Ship Canal Project to connect the east and west coasts of the country.

While exhibiting its readiness to expeditiously implement the Sethusamundram project that envisages a shorter sea route around peninsular India, the government, however, put the onus on the court in helping it execute the project.

'It is now for the court to resolve the contentious issues raised by the petitioners in the context of the evidence available and other related matters raised by the petitioners, and accordingly dispose of the petitions,' said the government in its 60-page affidavit.

The affidavit was filed by Secretary A.P.V.N. Sharma of the union Ministry for Shipping and Road Transport.

While reiterating its earlier stand that the Ram Sethu was not a man-made structure but a natural formation, the government attributed the remark to a committee of eminent persons, which it had constituted after withdrawing its earlier controversial affidavit, which doubted existence of the Lord Ram and the events of Ramayana.

The government had constituted a committee of eminent person October 5, 2007 to review the entire project. The committee submitted its report to the government November 29, 2007, which was presented to the court for the perusal.

Seeking the court decision on the tangled issue, the government said that the Sethusamudram Ship Canal Project could become operational by November this year if the apex court grants clearance after disposing of the petitions.

'The environmental monitoring carried out for the past 25 months at different locations have revealed that there is no significant influence on physical, chemical and biological parameters due to dredging in the Palk Strait and the Adam's Bridge, and that these investigations have indicated the normal productivity and bio-diversity in the area,' the affidavit said.

The government also ruled out the prospect of any danger to a marine biosphere reserve in the Indian Ocean close to Indian coast. The government said that marine biosphere reserve would be at least 20 kilometres away from the proposed navigational sea route.

( © IANS / India eNews)