

Kerala for all-party meet on Vizhinjam port

Kerala has decided to hold an all-party meet soon to discuss ways to give a boost to the Vizhinjam port project in the wake of steps taken by neighbouring Tamil Nadu to build a port 40 km away from the Kerala port's proposed site.

'The date and time is yet to be fixed but it has been decided to call an all-party meeting to discuss what needs to be done on the Vizhinjam project,' said Kerala Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan here.

Tamil Nadu is planning a state-of-the-art port at Colachel, which is 40 km away from the Vizhinjam port site.

The Vizhinjam port project is hanging fire for over six months after the Centre refused to clear the project due the presence of two Chinese companies in a three-member consortium that won the tender.

The consortium comprises the Kaidi Electric Power Company, the China Harbour Engineering Company and Mumbai-based Zoom Developers. They had been given the nod to begin construction by the previous Kerala government led by Oommen Chandy.

Achuthanandan had led an all-party delegation to Delhi in August to urge Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to grant clearance to the Rs.43.6-billion port project.

But the centre stuck to its stand since the Chinese companies are also reportedly working on a port in Pakistan.

Elias John, who is in the forefront of a massive campaign for the project, said the port might not see the light of day unless action is taken soon.

'Colachel is just 40 km from Vizhinjam and Tamil Nadu ministers, especially the Shipping Minister T.R. Baalu, will do anything to get the project going. If they are going to float the tender first, then Vizhinjam will loose out because companies prefer to work in Tamil Nadu for various reasons,' John told IANS.

But Kerala Ports Minister M. Vijayakumar said that there was no cause for concern, as work on the project would begin in a year, even if a new tender had to be invited.

A major advantage Vizhinjam has over other ports in India is that it needs no dredging. Moreover, it lies very close to the international waters.

An area of 150 acres has been earmarked for the port and there would be no displacement of the local fishing population, according to the project proposal.

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