

Shipping ministry wants Gopal Subramaniam out of Sethu case

The union shipping ministry, headed by DMK's T.R. Baalu who is keen on seeing the Sethusamudram canal project through, is upset with Additional Solicitor General Gopal Subramaniam for withdrawing from the apex court its affidavit on the project, and has asked that the law officer be taken off the case.

In a letter to the law ministry, dated Sep 26, the shipping ministry has expressed lack of confidence in Subramaniam to represent and articulate its views in the court in response to the petition by Janata Party president Subramaniam Swamy.

The letter, to which IANS is privy, says: 'There is, thus, an apparent contradiction and confusion at all stages that has presumably been created by the ASG,' and adds, 'Mr Gopal Subramaniam, Addl. SG, may be dissociated from this case...'

The Sethusamudram Shipping Canal Project (SSCP) has triggered controversy over an affidavit by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in the apex court. The Affidavit stated there was no historical evidence to prove the existence of Hindu god Ram or of the Ram Sethu, which many Hindus claim is the bridge referred to in the epic 'Ramayana' and may face destruction if the project is allowed.

The opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), quick to react, alleged that it was an insult to Hindu religious sentiment, prompting the government to withdraw the affidavit.

Besides the ASI, the shipping ministry too had filed a separate affidavit reaffirming the government's position on the Sethusamudram project, giving details of how it had progressed, including during the years when the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was in power. It also cited the report of experts that enabled the government to decide on the viability of this project.

Gopal Subramaniam withdrew both the affidavits and the shipping ministry has since been furious with the ASG for doing this without its consent.

The ministry suggests in its letter 'some other senior advocate should be entrusted with this responsibility'.

According to the letter, Shipping and Transport Minister Baalu summoned Subramaniam to demand an explanation on why he withdrew the shipping ministry affidavit. But Subramaniam has reportedly ignored the 'request' of the minister.

The letter says, 'In such sensitive cases of national importance, a senior law officer such as the ASG should have been extremely careful and circumspect in his averments before the court and in tendering advice to the department.'

It states that the minister personally requested the ASG to meet him on Sep 13, a day before the case came up for hearing in the Supreme Court. Again after the court hearing, the minister requested Subramaniam to meet him but 'on both the occasions, the learned Addl. SG could not turn up'.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court stayed Monday's DMK-sponsored bandh in Tamil Nadu in support of the project, in response to a petition by the AIADMK.

Faraz Ahmad (© IANS / India eNews)