

ABSTRACT

Sethusamudram Project is a marine project that is to envisage dredging of a ship channel across the Palk Straits between India and Sri Lanka since July 2005. The project will allow ships sailing between the East and West coast of India to have an alternative passage through India's territorial waters, instead of circumnavigate around Sri Lanka. This ship channel is a plan that initiated by India during pre Independence era in order to introduce a shorter sea route to avoid sailing around Sri Lanka. Though it is stated that the main concern of the Indian authorities on SSCP is to cut down the existing expenditure by sailing around Sri Lanka and also to gain the economic advantage at maximum level by developing harbours in the eastern coast of India as the main harbours of South Asia, the real interests are very much differ to what stated.

However, Sri Lanka's concerns over the implication of this SSCP may divide into three parts. They are economic, ecological and security. As per the United Nations Convention in Law of the Sea, Sri Lanka has no legal right to protect the dredging of the channel in Indian territorial waters. Further, Sri Lanka's actions against the damage that occur on ecological aspects also will not be sufficient enough to undermine the strategic decisions of government of India. As such, Sri Lanka should have to find their own ways to overcome the implication that could occur on mainly economic and second by security concerns. The vital contribution to the economy of the country by Colombo Harbour will be severely affected due to the reasons that the existing hub concepts of the Southeast Asia will definitely transfer to India when the channel is operational. Therefore, Sri Lanka should have to find a sustainable solution to overcome this dewatering issue.

It is evident that the larger ships that exceed the permissible draft of 10 m in the channel will not be able to sail. Further, the canal will not sufficient enough to operate larger naval vessels as well as submarines due to the depth of the same. That proves the real motive of our powerful neighbour is not to dominate their naval power in the coastal region. The real interest of India will remain as a secret for another period of time though it is stated that the project has started by allocating necessary funds of nearly 3 crores of Indian Rupees and still in the process of dredging in the Palk Bay.

As such, when considering on National security, Sri Lanka should have to review and implement a comprehensive National Security Policy to face the future challengers , with the due consideration on SSCP. However, the Sethusamudram Ship Canal Project seems to be adversely affected to Sri Lanka on several issues such as environmental, ecological and economic and especially on the National Security in the long run.