

February 2, 2010

Dr Manmohan Singh
Prime Minister of India
Prime Minister's Office
South Block, Raisina Hill
New Delhi 110 001
India

Dear Dr. Manmohan Singh:

Open Letter re. The Gulf of Mannar

The Gulf of Mannar World Heritage Site & Save Ram Sethu Campaigns write to express our deep concern and disappointment at your recent announcement saying you intend to carry out an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) of the Sethusamudram.

We are extremely disappointed that you have chosen to force this issue into a costly EIA, ignoring unambiguous national and international appeals, oft-repeated warnings, highly critical reviews and troubling questions raised by world-renowned specialists, experts and religious leaders on the disastrous effects on the environment and livelihood of people in the region, should the shipping canal be created.

The Resolutions we made at our November 2008 meeting at the Linnean Society in London – Resolutions delivered to your office - confirm the unanimous agreement among political, religious and scientific communities in India and abroad, that the SSCP is an ill-conceived venture with the potential to destroy permanently the unique and fragile marine ecology of the Gulf of Mannar.

Detailed studies conducted by international organizations such as the IUCN recognize the Gulf of Mannar as an international priority site for many reasons – its biophysical and ecological uniqueness; the fact it is home to many rare and endangered plant and animal species; its economic, social and cultural value; its national and global significance.

As the Gulf of Mannar includes Ram Sethu (Adam's Bridge) it also has great religious significance to the people of India, as well as ancient linkages to Hindu traditions inspiring millions of Hindus worldwide.

We again urge you to scrap the SSCP and designate the Gulf of Mannar a *UNESCO World Heritage mixed Natural and Cultural site*. If you do not, you fly in the face of the global campaign to preserve biodiversity. You know full well that The Gulf of Mannar fulfills the criteria and requirements set forth in the *World Heritage Convention* for designation as a *World Heritage Site*.

Responsible world leaders and their citizens contemplate ways to save the earth's environment. You must recognise that dredging and destroying one of the world's few remaining ecological hotspots to create a shipping channel translates into an environmental disaster and a crime against this planet.

If this project goes ahead, more than 100 species of corals and thousands of sea turtles and endangered sea animals such as dolphins and dugongs will be irrevocably harmed. We know the shipping lanes will bring pollution into the area and mankind will lose forever a part of its precious and fragile environment.

How can you begin to justify such action on the grounds that it is 'convenient' for people and helps the economy? To continue this project will be a sin against nature and the generations to come. On the other hand, if the government of India declares the Gulf of Mannar a World Heritage site, it will leave a lasting legacy for the people of India and the citizens of the world.

Our already endangered marine ecosystems are the lifeblood of our planet. It is of grave concern to us that what nature has shaped in the course of billions of years will be destroyed forever by the SSCP. The ecology of the Gulf of Mannar and its significance as an ancient pilgrimage site is such an important part of the heritage of the world; it belongs to the whole of humanity, both past and future generations. No one has any authority to defile it.

Yours sincerely,

The Gulf of Mannar World Heritage Site & Save Ram Sethu Campaigns

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Dr. Anantanand Rambachan (USA)

Author, Professor and Chair of Religion, Saint Olaf College, Minnesota, USA

Guest at the last four General Assemblies of the World Council of Churches

Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue at the Vatican

Member of the International Advisory Council for the Tony Blair Faith Foundation

Dr. Ranil Senanayake (Sri Lanka)

Systems Ecologist, Marine Archaeologist, Ichthyologist and Herpetologist
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Prince of Dalem Benculuh Tegeh Kori

General Chairman, the Foundation of the Indonesian Tourism Envoy Association (ADWINDO); President, the Sukarno Center, Leader, the Mahendradata Foundation IGN

Representing 3.2 million Hindus of Bali & 15 million Hindus of Indonesia

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