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	The Sunday TIMES	2007/04/01	

Lanka tells India to resume Sethusamudram talks

Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama has requested India to resume talks on the controversial Sethusamudram Ship Channel Project.

Minister Bogollagama made this request from the Indian Government during his visit to New Delhi last week, The Sunday Times learns.

Colombo has been offered as the venue for the fourth round of bi-lateral talks, which should have been convened by India in New Delhi. The third round of bilateral talks was held in Colombo in April last year and Sri Lanka made a number of requests including the setting up of a Joint Environmental Management Plan for Impact Assessment of the project area. Since then New Delhi has kept mum on the issues raised by Sri Lanka.

May 29 and 30 have been proposed for the meeting, but the Indian Government, though verbally agreeing to resuming the talks has yet to confirm the dates.

Indian High Commission's Commercial Counsellor Sanjay Sudhir said yesterday, "We are considering the dates proposed. We will come back no sooner a decision is taken."

Officials in Colombo are uncertain whether the Indian government will be



Bogollagama

ready for a substantive meeting to address Sri Lanka's growing concerns on the Ship Channel Project. They said there was a possibility that the Indian side would come for a "nominal conference" for the sake of having a meeting as happened in the past, without

getting down to substantive matters.

A fortnight ago The Sunday Times INSIGHT published a report stating that the project was stuck on the Indian side due to what some have ventured to describe as nature's protest or even divine intervention, while the Sri Lanka Government avoids taking suitable action like going into international arbitration if the Indian Government kept ignoring Colombo's concerns on the issue.