

Guwahati ropeway project in doldrums



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Much awaited Rs32 crore aerial ropeway project between north and south banks of Brahmaputra river connecting Guwahati city and North Guwahat, undertaken by the Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) remains under the shadow of uncertainty due to objection raised by the Archeological Survey of India (ASI). According to reliable sources the GMDA issued work order for construction of the ropeway connecting both banks of the Brahmaputra via Urvashi Island to M/s Samir Damodar Ropeway Pvt Ltd, who constructed four big size RCC pillars in the Umananda Island to install high structure for ropeway project. Getting reports of some irregularities a team of a NGO, namely, Citizens' First, consisting of Ajay Dutta, Ex- MLA, Krishna Kanto Borooah, Jagannath Das, General Secretary of the Forum and renowned archaeologist, Dr Pradip Sarma, visited the site of construction on the Umananda Island and found that the said company had occupied a portion of the island and piled deep inside its rock bed to raise RCC pillars. By its such act, the company had not only made an undue invasion in Umananda Island, but it made an onslaught on the revered place of Hindus.

In a memorandum to the Chief Secretary, Government of Assam, they said that it had come to the notice of the visiting team that the company damaged different sculptures of ancient period, which were found lying scattered there. By such irresponsible and improper acts the company clearly violated the provisions of Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act. The memorandum further mentioned that there had been a raging controversy regarding the construction of ropeway by the side of three islands of Urvashi, Karmanasha and Umananda. These are the witness to ancient ruins of temple and images of Gods and Goddesses. Besides, the islands are revered as place of pilgrimages from ancient times. There were visible signs of Royal sculptures in the islands. Being impressed with the site the British rulers had named the island of Umananda as “Peacock Island.’



The NGO mentioned that the people were very much anguished after the information about such construction on the Umananda Island and demanded the removal of such construction ropeway project. They also demanded that the Archaeology Department should take immediate steps to preserve the ruins of the Island which were lying scattered there. The organization appealed to the Chief Secretary, Assam, to impress upon the construction company to stop construction work on the rock bed of the Umananda Island considering the situation and take necessary legal action against all concerned, who in clear violation of provisions of Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act and the State government notification for taking up such construction work.

After getting the clearance from Environment Ministry and the Inland Waterways Authority, the GMDA had given green signal to begin construction work and the work started in the year 2009, but the problem started when the Ancient Monuments and Archeological Sites and Remains (Amendment and Validation) Act was passed in the year 2010. The very Act says that no construction works be undertaken within 300 meters areas of the centrally protected monuments/sites. According to GMDA sources the key pillar of the rope way would fall within 230 meters of Urvashi Island and the ASI put objection to it citing the provisions of the Ancient Monuments Act. Following the pressure from ASI, the construction works of the project was stopped since February 2011. The purpose of the ropeway was to boost tourism and reduce the travel time between the North and South banks of the Brahmaputra.

Dr H N Dutta, Director of ASI, Guwahati alleged the violation of by-laws of the Ancient Monuments and Archeological Sites and Remains (Amendment and Validation) Act 2010 by GMDA, as Umananda Island was also an archeologically protected site. The GMDA had changed the ropeway construction plan due to Ancient Monuments Act and has maintained that there was no problem in construction of the key pillar on Umananda Island as the pillar would not cost any impact on the beauty of the river island. The ASI director alleged that the GMDA had also breached its building by-laws while constructing the ropeway. Meanwhile the GMDA submitted around Rs.50 crore new project proposal for the ropeway to the State Government for its clearance and a committee has been formed by the Government headed by the Additional Chief Secretary J Khosla to look into the implimentation of the much hyped project.

Daya Nath Singh

Journalist; Guwahati Press Club office Secretary

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