

Kerala plans to float global EPC tender for Vizhinjam Port by March

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Kerala plans to invite global engineering, procurement and construction bids for the Rs 7,800-crore Vizhinjam Port by March and expects the results of an environment impact assessment (EIA) study on the project to be out by June, a top state government official has said.

“We hope to float a global EPC tender for the Vizhinjam Port project as early as March and also to get the EIA nod from the Union Environment Ministry by June-July,” the State PWD and Ports Secretary, Mr Manoj Joshi, told PTI here.

The EIA is being conducted by a consortium of L&T-Ramboll and Asian Consulting Engineers. The EIA will assess the potential impact of the project on marine life and ecology, among other environmental issues.

Mr Joshi also said Aecom, the global firm roped in as a consultant on the project, will reach the port site anytime now for an inspection. This inspection will be crucial in floating the global EPC tender.

He was here as part of a delegation led by the State PWD Minister, Mr V.K. Ebrahim Kunju, to study concrete roads in the city.

Mr Kunju said his government will convert the 25-km Seaport-Airport Road in Kochi into concrete and expressed hope that work could begin before the monsoon.

Earlier this month, the Foreign Ministry had given a green signal for short-listing Australian firm Leighton Engineering Holdings, a partner in a Welspun Infratech consortium, as one of the prospective operators of the Kerala government-owned Vizhinjam International Deepwater Multipurpose Seaport, which was conceptualised in 2003.

The other short-listed bidder is a consortium led by Mundra Ports & SEZ, which has also been cleared by the Defence Ministry.

Twelve other parties had also submitted bids for the project, including a Shipping Corporation of India-led consortium, but later backed out.

However, the two short-listed bidders are yet to secure no-objection certificates from the Union Home Ministry for taking up the operator’s role.

On the appointment of a port operator, Mr Joshi said it was expected soon and so was security clearance for the project.

When asked about reported differences with the Centre over ‘major port’ status’ for the project, as well as the ownership structure, he said, “We are not bothered about the major port tag. Our objective is to ensure that the port project is implemented at the earliest.”

For a port to get ‘major port’ status, majority ownership (51 per cent) has to be with the Centre, as per the Major Ports Act.

But Kerala wants the proposed port near the state capital Thiruvananthapuram to be under its ownership and control.

However, Mr Joshi added, a final call will be taken after ascertaining the Plan allocation for the ports sector in the 12th Plan.

Asked when the first phase of the project — involving an estimated investment of Rs 4,000 crore — will be completed, Mr Joshi did not give an answer, saying it was too early, as much crucial permission have to be in place and civil work was yet to start.

Three-fourths of the first phase investment will be contributed by Kerala. The project will be implemented in three phases. According to the current Plan, the state plans to flag off the first container ship at the port in 2015.

The Vizhinjam Port will follow the landlord model, under which dredging, reclamation and basic infrastructure like construction of a breakwater and the quay will be done by state-owned special purpose vehicle Vizhinjam International Seaport — which was set up in August — while the port will be operated by a private party, which will build the terminal structure and maintain it for the first 30 years.

Once operational, Vizhinjam will be the deepest port in the country, dwarfing even JNPT and Visakhapatnam. The port has a natural depth of up to 23 metres.

It will have the capacity to load 2.8 million standard containers and 1.8 million tonnes a year of other types of cargo, excluding containers, when it is fully operational.