

## **THE ERSTWHILE BUCKINGHAM CANAL, A MUST FOR REVIVAL AS SOUTH-EAST COAST INLAND WATER WAY.,**

*The Central government through parliament act has declared the 1079 km length Canal a national inland waterway-4 and to invest around Rs 2000 crore to revive and make it navigable.*

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“India has rich natural and water wealth, especially in eastern half of the land but vastly un-organised. Proper utility of waterway is the need of hour to develop this region and running cargo boats through the developed navigation waterways would benefit thousands of people here as well as in England. Kindly consider my proposal of linking the rivers Mahanadhi in Central province and River Cauvery in Southern part by constructing a canal minimum with a draft of 3 metres. Initially the Government should construct a canal diverting excess water flowing from river Krishna and Godavari and utilize the same as water route to Madras along the coast line”.

This was the 'note' written by none other than the 'Delta-King', Sir Arthur Thomas Cotton in the year 1859 sent to the then British Government at London. Sir Cotton, the man who came to India as an evangelist but he as a civil Engineer was appointed by the then East India Company bosses. Sir Cotton had conceived and developed during his glorious time three important Delta Check Dams in South India, on rivers Godavari, Krishna and Cauvery.

When his 'note' went in to the hands of British Government, keeping in mind the turmoil it faced that time in Indian soil (East India Company's administration over Indian states was taken over by British Queen due to the Indian Independence war which erupted in 1857), not interested in investing money in India for its development and unceremoniously rejected Sir Cotton's advice. The dejected Cotton, who gave lifeline to South India by constructing four dams at river Godavari, two dams at river Cauvery and planned one dam at river Krishna and plenty of irrigation and navigation canals in South and East India, and also Australia, left for hometown in the year 1860 after spending more than thirty five fruitful years in India. Though the British ditched her own citizen, Sir Cotton was fondly remembered by the people at Rajamundry of Andhra Pradesh for controlling the annual and regular devastating flood in river Godavari, and even constructed a temple for him at Dowleshwaram (Rajamundry).

The man who landed in India to spread his religion instead got blessed with Godly status.. The British Government ditched him but not the Indian people who have got a great relief from floods year after year. India returned back her gratitude, the highest status for his wonderful services to the human kind, by erecting his statue at the banks of river Godavari.

But after twenty year of this incident, the same British government agreed to his vision and for constructing a navigation canal linking 'Pedda Vengi' in Godavari District of coastal AP and Cuddalore, a coastal town of Tamilnadu near Pudhucheri. The canal was constructed during later part of 19th century itself and called as 'Buckingham Canal'. This navigation canal was used for more than fifty years to carry agricultural goods, coal and wooden logs from the rich hinterland of Andhra delta fields to gateway port at Madras from there to English colonies. When the National Highways and Road and Rail system were used as modern and speed transportation system, the lesser drafted waterway through the old Buckingham Canal became unviable. This was in the middle of 20th century and that time rail freight traffic was considered as easier than the conventional wooden boat carrying cargo freight in the lesser deep canal.

The canal received the name Buckingham Canal in 1878 as this was built under the supervision of the then Governor, the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos. The canal runs around 1 km back from the shore. The River Cooum joins the canal to the sea in

the heart of Chennai. The segment north of the Cooum is called the North Buckingham Canal, and the section south of the Cooum is known as the South Buckingham Canal. Nearly 260 km of the total length of the canal is in the state of coastal Andhra, and 160 km is in Tamil Nadu state. About 31 km is within the city boundaries of Chennai.

The most important news that during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the Buckingham Canal acted as a safeguard zone and regulated the tsunami waves on the coastal area over almost 300 km from Southern part of Krishna River in Andhra coast to Chennai, the Buckingham canal had saved lives of several people from the fury of unknown Tsunami of 26th Dec 2004. It acted as Buffer Zone to save people from Tsunami.

Wherever the canal is available, during the great Tsunami the canal all along the coastline was packed with tsunami water, which poured out at a few places and retreated back to the sea within 10 to 15 min. This helped a long way in saving the lives of a number of fishermen, particularly in coastal Andhra Pradesh and fractions of the Chennai city and also helped in clearing the aquaculture remains. The natural growth of vegetation on both the sides of the canal also helped in lessening the impact of the tsunami.

The revival project has been cleared in recent past, which would cost around Rs. 2000 crore to investors and the length of waterway will be around 1000 kms. The Union Shipping Ministry is keen to construct a navigation canal by reviving the old Buckingham Canal route as recognized national Inland Water Way. The proposal is based on a study conducted by the Rail India Technical and Economic Services (RITES), which states that the canal will carry 6.42 million tonnes of cargo immediately on revival of the existing canal. The study envisages the setting up of terminals and developing barges so that private companies could hire or buy them to transport goods. Even Parliament has approved this project as nation's 4th Inland water way.

The proposed Canal Project could be constructed as two ways, one as Kakinada-Chennai and Mamallapuram-Marakkanam near Pudhucheri. The scheme envisaged boating between Kakinada and Chennai through the canal and through the sea in between Chennai and Mamallapuram (50 kms) and again through canal from there to Marakkanam.

Recently a new trend of feeling started in India about the improvement of Inland waterways as alternative transport route due to its cheaper cost and pollution free environments. Even places like Chennai; the Canal was used as an open drainage

system for long period. Metro Rail System of Southern Railway already used some parts of the canal for their construction for elevated rail tracks. In Andhra Pradesh limits, the same canal still usable in the parts of Guntur district for irrigation purpose, but most of the canal route was occupied by encroachers or not maintained properly without water, which resulted into non-existence of one such a great canal..

Now, in the modern days of transport system when the Inland Water ways are compared with other routes, it's cheaper cost in freight surprises many. An expert in Inland Waterways says that only one tenth of Road transportation freight cost is being spent on transportation through waterway. Especially for Bulk loads of exports and import cargo like Coking coal, Thermal coal, Raw Fertilizers, Wheat, Rice, Tobacco, Chilli and Minerals, the transportation through waterway is more beneficial for both Government and traders considering the cost of fuel and competition we are facing in the national and international arena, the experts said. Using waterways also can benefit even for Container Cargoes, they said. The experts shows the example of European inland water ways where most of nations used these channels for moving cargo from seaports.

For Inland Waterways, the least available depth (LAD) of 2-meter water level to be maintained to take 1.8 drafts cargo vessel for round-the-year operation. Extensive bandalling work and day channel marking to be provided for safe Navigation. Regular maintenance of dredging to be observed. RCC Terminals to be constructed at important cargo junctions along with floated Jetties to be provided for safe handling of cargoes. Facilities such as pilotage and lighted buoys provision to be provided at important cargo centers. Of course, this is being taken care by Inland Waterways Authority of India under Union government.

The Inland Waterways Authority of India Limited (IWAI), which was established on 1986 to regulate and develop Inland Waterways for the purpose of Shipping and Navigation, already has three national waterways in India under its belt, namely

1. Ganga-Bhagirathi-Hooghly River System of 1620 kms (from Allahabad to Haldia).
2. Brahmaputra Waterway of 891 kms (from Guwahati to Sadiya).
3. West Coast Canal of 205 kms (from Kottapuram to Udyogmandal).

The IWAI have 3 divisions (1) Rajabagan Dockyard in Kolkata (2) River Services Division which operating a fleet of cargo vessels in the three waterway routes and (3) Deep Sea Ship Repair Division at Kolkata which undertakes all type of repair works of ocean going vessels belonging to SCI, DCI and other port authorities. The IWAI have done business to tune of Rs. 1202.36 lakhs on freight carrying alone during year 2000. The total cargo carried during that year was 2,51,256 MT. Another Public

Sector company, Dredging Corporation of India which was doing the inland water way dredging have given up their activities of in-land dredging and handed over the dredgers meant for Inland water way to IWAI to take care of dredging.

From Chennai side, though the state public works department (PWD) has submitted a proposal at an estimated cost of Rs 25 crore to the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) for the dredging and cleaning of the 50-km stretch from Muttukadu creek to Edaiyur creek near Kalpakkam in the first phase of the project. They have also proposed to launch ferry service in the creek on an experimental basis to exploit the tourism potential. But, no progress has been made even after the submission of the proposal.

Under the state government project envisaged to promote inland water transport, the north Buckingham Canal will be revived and made navigable from Arangam village on the Tamil Nadu-Andhra Pradesh border to Ennore creek for a distance of 58 km and also the south Buckingham canal from Sholinganallur to Marakkanam, a distance of 105 km. However, the center portion of the canal, running to a length of 7.1 km, could not be made navigable due to construction of Mass Rapid Transport System, apart from this several encroachments have been taken place in this center part of Chennai city which could not be controllable by any authorities all these years.

However the TN state government project contains several logistic beneficial as it has also been planned to construct terminals at Pulicat lake, Basin Bridge, Palavakkam, Alamparai, Kazhanchi and Cuddalore for loading and unloading of goods. While project envisages the PWD to take up the dredging and cleaning work, the IWAI has been asked to create required infrastructure such as terminals (fixed or floating) and modification of existing bridges and culverts.

Earlier, the Tamilnadu state government has taken up this project report and initiated the work and approached Government of India for funding under JNNURAM scheme. As part of a string of canal widening measures in the city being funded under the JNNURM scheme, South Buckingham Canal will be widened from 25 metres to 100 metres between Okkiyam Madu and Muttukadu, which is a distance of 13.5 km. Apart from the widening of the canal, a straight-cut two kilometre canal from Okkiyam Madu will head directly to the sea. But the work was not taken up seriously due to various political reasons that includes devising a new highways on the stretch of Cooum river from Maduravoyal to Chennai Harbour for the purpose of entering easily for heavy vehicles into harbour. The fate of this project also is hanging in balance which is another story.

But taking seriously and too when the trade is under tremendous pressure in need of connectivity with least economical expenses, IWAI, can very well take up a new

Buckingham Canal Inland water route immediately. On completion of this project, the Kakinada-Marakkanam waterway would be the second largest waterway in India after the 1620 km length of Ganga-Bhagirathi-Hooghly system waterway. And no doubt, in the present flexible economic situation in the country, this would be a biggest boon for logistic providers of Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu.