

On Wed, Aug 19, 2009 at 8:47 PM, <icsf@icsf.net> wrote:

<http://www.hindu.com/2009/08/20/stories/2009082061510800.htm>

Coastal zone centre: Minister vetoes varsity's suggestion

“You must invest in people, not buildings”

CHENNAI: Anna University will soon host a National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Zone Management, to be funded by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests, which will conduct research in various aspects of coastal management, work with coastal communities and advise the Ministry on policy matters.

Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh and Vice-Chancellor P. Mannar Jawahar signed Letters of Intent to set up the centre here on Wednesday after a half-hour consultation.

However, the short consultation completely changed the shape and image of the proposed centre. The university had in mind a large building with world-class facilities to come up on 10 acres at a cost of more than Rs.85 crore, apart from at least Rs.30 crore for manpower.

The Minister dismissed the proposal within minutes. “You must invest in people, not buildings. In India, we have a tendency to go on building – first a centre, then a bungalow,” he said. “This [centre] should be nimble-footed, people-intensive. Give it a room or a floor with an Internet connection and get to work on putting a team together... You must begin to show results soon.”

He proposed initial funding of Rs.10 crore to hire 50 scientists, all with PhDs, in a variety of disciplines. “Phase One should be to put a critical team of people together... You start work and then come back to me with results after eight or nine months and we'll talk about Phase Two,” he said, saying that the buildings could wait for the next stage.

Mr. Ramesh also had a certain set of preconditions for the team to be hired – the average age must be below 35, half the team must be women and at least 60 per cent must be from outside Tamil Nadu. He also wanted fast results. “Can you get your team within a week?” he asked. “Don't go through your entire university procedure.” The Registrar had proposed a 3-month deadline to recruit the faculty. The Minister also proposed a name change – from ‘institute’ to ‘centre’ – in order to reflect a change in approach from academic research to societal impacts. “The focus of this centre is not science, the focus is people. What we need is an institution that looks out for the fishing

community,” he said, insisting that the centre recruit a mix of professionals from both the engineering and social sciences.

Eminent scientist M.S. Swaminathan, who had recommended setting up the institute in a July 2009 report, will act as an advisor to the centre.

The funding is coming from a World Bank-funded Integrated Coastal Zone Management Project, which has an overall budget of Rs.800 crore for the next five years. Having suggested the changes, Mr. Ramesh declined to sign the prepared Memorandum of Understanding on Wednesday, but instead, asked Anna University to identify space in existing buildings to house the centre and create a three-year funding proposal, so that the revised MoU could be signed on September 13.