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Greenlight for Sinharaja footpath

by D h a n e s h i Y A T A W A R A

The final report on the controversial Sinharaja road development recommends the foot path to be used as a nature trail without changing its present status.

"On the recommendations we would let the people use the foot path and this can be used by people as a nature trail as well in the future," Environment Minister Anura Priyadarshana Yapa said.

A special press conference was held last week to inform the media on the revelations of the expert teams investigations.

"This is solely an unbiased report by experts of the relevant fields. There were no intervention from any quarters of the society to alter the investigation," said Minister Yapa.

This foot path, extending nearly 3.5 kilometers is used by villagers and we have no restriction for them to use it yet the committee does not give permission to expand the road.

"This road actually existed nearly one and a half kilometers away from the Sinharaja border but many organizations allegedly claimed that it was across the forest. This is totally incorrect," Minister said.

The experts Committee on this investigation comprised Professor Nimal Gunathilake and Dr. Gamini Hitinayake of University of Peradeniya, IUCN Acting Country Representative Saman Widanage, Conservator of forests (Operational) K.P. Ariyadasa , Deputy Conservators of forests SAD Kingsley and Mahinda Senevirathne, Assitant Director Ministry of Environment Nilmini Wickramarachchi, Deputy Director General Central Environment Authority G. Jayasinghe, Deputy Director Provincial Central Environment Authority Ajith Wijesundara.

The team identified two sections of this road.

The road from Pothupitiya to Ilumbukanda is an established road and a bus operates on this route. And Ilumbukanda is also a very ancient village.

The Committee has no objection for developing this road," Minister Yapa said. Next is a 700m gravel road From Ilumbukanda to Bambumale which is also within the village to which the committee has no objection to its upgrading.

This gravel road ends at the border of the land that belong to the Land Reclamation Commission. The foot path is in this land.

"This land connects Sinharaja with the Handapan ella and Beralagala forest areas.

Thus the foot path should not be developed as it can obstruct the migratory animals between these forest patches," said Conservator of Forests (operational) K.P. Ariyadasa addressing the media.

"We don't want to disturb that eco-system and let the villagers use it as it is while developing other sides of the access roads," he added.

The Ministry in writing will inform the District and Divisional Secretaries of the area of these recommendations of the Committee.

The Land at present under the LRC will be handed over to the Department of Forest Conservation and as required by the official process the survey is in progress.

"This land does not belong to the world heritage site," said Ariyadasa. This land is not a primary forest and can not be declared as a world heritage site and if it needs to be proven a complicated research should be carried out to gain the necessary facts of fauna and flora that does not exist in Sinharaja, according to Ariyadasa.

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