Chennai - Salem: Green Express Way Corridor

What is the issue?

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- The proposed Greenfield highway between Chennai and Salem has run into opposition from various farmer organisations.
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- This is the latest in a series of protests against major projects in Tamil Nadu that include Kudankulam power plant and the Tuticorin copper plant.
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What is the project about?

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- **Proposal -** The proposed eight lane road is estimated to cost is Rs 9,106 crore, with a tentative Rs 415 crore for rehabilitation of the displaced people.
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- It will run 277 Km and is slated to pass through Kancheepuram, Tiruvannamalai, Krishnagiri and Dharmapuri districts.
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- The region is mostly agrarian with a few industrial zones and most of the land proposed to be usurped is fertile agricultural fields.
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- **Why -** There are three existing but twisty road routes between Chennai and Salem, two of which are already heavily trafficked, leading to abnormal delays.
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- Hence, Tamil Nadu CM Mr. Palaniswami is said to have written to the centre, suggested a highway that directly links the two cities and reduce fuel costs.
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- A subsequent feasibility report noted that the project is expected to generate development and employment in the towns along the route.
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- Hence, considering the business potential and other benefits, the centre is said to have approved the proposal and called it “Green Express Way Corridor”.
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- Notably, government’s feasibility report states that extensive public consultations were done and suggestions were also invited in the design stage.
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Why are farmer organisations protesting?

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- Contrary to the government’s claim, many farmer organisations claim that they were not consulted in finalising the project.
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- Farmer leaders have asserted that these regions do three crops a year and destroying these highly fertile lands for a highway cannot be accepted.
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- Also, the state that government’s promised maximum compensation in some regions is more than 10 times lower than the prevailing market rate.
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- It is being felt that the government is taking unusual interest in rushing a project that is likely t affect the livelihood of over 1 lakh people.
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- The protesters have planned multiple peaceful demonstrations against the project in stages.
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How has the government responded?

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- The revenue department is engaging retired officers to complete the survey and kick off the project due to staff shortage in its ranks.
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- Police have been arresting protest leaders, including Salem-based activist Piyush Manush and Valarmathi.
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- Sources say at least 10 people are in judicial custody for mobilising people, and protest participants across villages are also being arrested.
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What is the stand of the opposition DMK?

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- Opposition leader M K Stalin has said that his party will launch strong protests if the government tries to implement projects using police and force.
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- DMK has also moved a petition before the vigilance and anti-corruption wing, alleging that the CM has made malicious gains through the project's tender.
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- The allegation is that contracts running into crores of rupees were given to people closely related to the CM's family at inflated costs.
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Source: Indian Express

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