Kaleshwaram Irrigation Project

Why in news?

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The Kaleshwaram lift irrigation project in Telangana has attracted considerable national attention.

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What is Kaleshwaram project about?

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- Kaleshwaram is a town on Godavari right bank about 300 km downstream of major dam, Sriram Sagar project (SRSP).
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- At Kaleshwaram, the major tributary Pranahita, which merges with Godavari brings large quantity of water, the place is also known as Sangam and Dakshin Ganga.
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- The project proposes to lift about 180 TMC (about 5 billion cubic meters) of water.
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- It includes construction of barrages, high speed pumps for transport of water upstream for providing for irrigation.
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- Besides, it involves constructions of network storage dams, series of tunnels, canals water passing through several stages of pumping and reverse flow into Godavari River.
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What are the concerns with the project?

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- **Feasibility concerns -** Various civil society organisations involved in water management and resettlement of evictees have questioned the proposed benefits accruing to farmers, they argue that
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1. The 180 TMC water is not enough for 26 lakh acres for any meaningful irrigation.
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2. The crop yields have been grossly inflated almost 10 times as compared to the current levels for projecting highly favourable benefits/outcomes.
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3. The complete omission of social and ecological costs in the report.
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- **Financial concerns -** The estimated project cost is Rs.80,450 crore and the annual maintenance costs including interest payments will be around a Rs.13,923 crore.
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- In short, this project is unlikely to generate benefits of more than Rs.4,000 crore while the State would spend Rs.13,000 crore every year.
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- The Telangana government is going to spend four times more on the operation and maintenance costs than all the benefits that would accrue to farmers.
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- **False Claims -** The benefits from the agriculture sector in the report are based on three assumptions, such as irrigation to 24 lakh acres, increases in the yield of 12 crops will be of 500-900 per cent more than current reported yields and all the produce will be getting higher prices.
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- But normally when production of a crop like chilli increase by 20 per cent more than the average of the previous year, prices tend to slump to historic lows with few buyers in the market.
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- Even the data on the projected increase in the area of irrigation, yields, and profit margins in the DPR are based on questionable assumptions which fail

to reflect the current realities of costs of products and prices of the products at the market place.
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- **Ecological and livelihood concerns -** The project will displace at least 30,000 people in 19 villages.
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- Further, the project is going to affect the total land of around 100,000 acres (40,015 hectares).
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- Considering all other costs, this project is going to be a major burden for Telangana people and farmers for generations to come.
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- One thing the DPR clearly proves is that the project is not about sustainable development of the State.
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What is the way forward?

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- Instead of submitting the DPR to an unbiased independent assessment, the speed with which the State government is implementing the project raises serious questions.
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- That it will lead to irreversible and massive economic, social and ecological damage is beyond doubt.
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- The Kaleshwaram project needs an independent review of costs, benefits, and technical specifications.
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- This needs to be done at the earliest and if it confirms that this project would generate the benefits and turnover for the farmers and solve the farming crisis in Telangana, then, it should be implemented.
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Source: Business Line

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