Mumbai Coastal Road Project

Why in News?

The Supreme Court stayed a Bombay High Court order that had quashed Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) clearance granted to the southern part of Mumbai's coastal road project.

What is Mumbai's Coastal Road project?

- The **Bandra-Worli Sea Link** in Mumbai, the financial capital of India was originally planned as one arm of a longer sea link.
- The longer one would connect Bandra, queen of the suburbs, with Nariman Point, the commercial hub of south Mumbai.
- The Worli-Haji Ali Sea Link was already tendered out, in 2011, when the then Chief Minister (CM) suggested replacing it with a coastal road.
- This coastal road will be a sea-kissing highway that would be less expensive than a sea link.
- The sea links were then being planned and executed by Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC).
- The government appointed a technical committee and it reported the approximate cost of the sea link and for the reclamation of land along the coast for a seaside highway.
- The Worli-Haji Ali Sea Link project was cancelled abruptly and replaced with **plans for a coastal road connecting Nariman Point with Kandivali**, a suburb towards the northern end of the western seaboard.
- This planned freeway will complement another freeway running along the eastern coastline, from South Mumbai to Chembur.
- This coastal road will reduce travel time between Nariman Point and Kandivali.
- Eventually, the then CM also decided that the coastal road would be built by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, not the MSRDC.
- The Bandra-Worli Sea Link was completed in 2009.
- In the decade since, traffic between the suburbs and south Mumbai has grown even as Mumbaikars wait for the next logical arm of the proposed connectivity between Bandra and Nariman Point.

Were all approvals for the project in place before litigation began?

- **Reclamation** - In June 2015, the central government gave permissions for the reclamation for the project.
- Much of Mumbai as we know it today is on reclaimed land, and the proposed reclamation for the coastal road was given the nod conditional to final CRZ clearances.
- **First proposal** - In 2016, the Maharashtra Coastal Zone Management Authority (MCZMA) accorded sanction.
- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) considered the proposal for CRZ clearance but later it rejected this.
- The Ministry said that the proposal lacked a disaster management plan, the environment impact reports had lacunae and there was also no approval from the state and central pollution control bodies.
- It also said the proposal failed to highlight the exceptional circumstances for grant of clearances for reclamation.
- **Revised proposal** - In October 2016, the BMC submitted a revised proposal to the MCZMA, limiting it to the first phase of the project.
- This is a 9.9-km coastal road from Marine Drive to the Worli or south end of the Bandra-Worli Sea Link.
- Only 90 hectares would be reclaimed in this phase.
- The MoEF&CC granted its final CRZ approval in May 2017.

What is the dispute?

- Environmentalists, activists and fishermen opposed the project.
- Their main contention was that the BMC is implementing the project with faulty green clearances accorded in 2017 by the MoEFF&CC.
- They have claimed the project lacks a mandatory prior Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) clearance under the EIA notification of 2006.
- Activists had demanded that a biodiversity study of the Mumbai coast is also required before going ahead.
- They also called a National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) report flawed as it relied on only 14 days' pre-monsoon data.
- An EIA study requires impact in all four seasons to be studied, they contended.
- Fishermen also claimed that the reclamation will destroy shallow water fishing and increase the turbidity of water, and that the narrow gaps between pillars will hinder movement of fishing boats.

Is the proposed road to be entirely built on new reclamation?

- According to the BMC designs, the coastal road will be a combination of,
    1. Roads on stilts;
    2. Roads built on reclamation, a small sea link our bridge portion,

3. A proposed under-sea tunnel,
4. The Bandra-Worli Sea Link.

- The rest of the highway is to be considered in Phase 2, for which clearances are still to be sought.
- This will include a coastal road from the Bandra end of the Sea Link till Khar Danda village, where a small bridge on the sea-ward side of Chimbai village will provide navigation space for fishing boats.
- The land filled road is proposed to be designed so that it does not obstruct a dense mangrove patch here.
- A spur is to be built for future connectivity all the way to Madh Island.
- Of the 35-km freeway, roughly 18 km will be constructed on reclaimed land. The two tunnels will be about 9 km in length.

What happens now?

- After the SC stayed the Bombay HC's July order, the BMC will resume reclamation work at four points – Priyadarshini Park, Napeansea Road, Haji Ali and Worli.
- In July, when the HC had quashed the MoEF&CC's CRZ clearance for the southern stretch of the project, the BMC had already completed 4 to 5% of reclamation required at these sites.
- Having exhausted their legal remedies, the petitioners were disappointed with the SC order, said they would work with the government and authorities.
- They also said that they would try to ensure that the livelihood of fishermen is not impacted.

Source: Indian Express

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering