Protest against Kerala's SilverLine project

What is the issue?

Despite protests against Kerala's SilverLine project Kerala government remains firm on implementing the project.

What is the SilverLine project?

- The proposed 529 km SilverLine is a semi high-speed railway project executed by the Kerala Rail Development Corporation Limited (KRDCL) at a cost of over Rs 63,000 crore.
- It will link Thiruvananthapuram in the south to Kasaragod in the north. The deadline for the project is 2025.
- It covers 11 districts through 11 stations. One can travel from Kasaragod to Thiruvananthapuram in less than four hours at 200 km/hr.
- On the existing Indian Railways network, it now takes 12 hours.
- KRDCL, or K-Rail, is a joint venture between the Kerala government and the Union Ministry of Railways created to execute big railway projects.
- The line is expected to be constructed using equity funds from the Kerala government, the Centre and loans from multilateral lending agencies.

What are its key features?

- According to K-Rail, the project will have trains of electric multiple unit (EMU) type, each with preferably nine cars extendable to 12.
- A nine-car rake can seat a maximum of 675 passengers in business and standard class settings.
- The trains can run at a maximum speed of 220 km/hr on a standard gauge track
- At every 500 metres, there will be under-passages with service roads.
- The Cochin International Airport Limited (CIAL) has offered one acre for the station there.

What are the benefits of the project?

- Take a significant load of traffic off the existing stretch.
- Make travel faster for commuters
- Reduce congestion on roads and help reduce accidents.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions,
- Expansion of Ro-Ro services
- Produce employment opportunities
- Integrate airports and IT corridors
- Enable faster development of cities it passes through.

Why are there protests against the project?

- Various Political parties as well as citizen outfits such as K-Rail SilverLine Viruddha Janakeeya Samiti have been spearheading separate protests.
- Though the project will upgrade the railway infrastructure, people raise the following concerns
    - financial viability.
    - Affordability of the train service given the cost of building it
    - debt-ridden nature of state economy.
    - environmental and social impact.
    - ecological cost at a time the state is tackling climate change.
    - the route cuts through precious wetlands, paddy fields and hills.
    - Displacement of over 30,000 families.
    - Rehabilitation of people.
    - Building embankments on either side of the line will block natural drainage and cause floods during heavy rains.
    - Lack of consultation.
- Despite these protests Kerala government remains firm on implementing the project.

Where does the project stand now?

- The Cabinet gave its approval in June this year.
- The state government has begun the process of land acquisition.
- Out of 1,383 hectares needed to be acquired, 1,198 hectares will be private land.
- The Cabinet has also approved administrative sanction of Rs 2,100 crore from the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB), the central investment arm of the government.
- The Centre has only given an in-principle approval to the project.
- A detailed project report (DPR) was released by the government following demands by opposition parties and activists.

Reference

1. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/kerala-silverline-project-features-protests-7748591/

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