Salem Greenfield Highway

Why in news?

Supreme Court has overruled Madras High Court verdict in acquiring agricultural land for the proposed Chennai-Salem Greenfield highway.

What was the verdict of the Madras High Court?

- Earlier, the Madras High court set aside the process of acquiring virgin land for the Greenfield highway.
- It stated that protecting the environment, agriculture and rural livelihoods are more important than the economic benefits of the new highway.
- It showed a greater sensitivity to livelihood and ecological concerns.
- It also relied on U.S. judgments - which were against in letting the projects in advance to such a stage that there is irreversible commitment of resources.

What was the Supreme Court Verdict?

- It ruled that the Madras High Court was wrong in holding that environmental clearances is required even before the initial land acquisition notice.
- It will be premature to expect the authorities to obtain environmental approvals at the stage of identifying the land.
- It also said that once the land was notified for acquisition and surveyed for feasibility, all statutory clearances have to be applied.
- Land could be taken over & construction can begin only after environmental clearances are given.
- Measures has to be taken for mitigating the possible environmental damage.
- It goes on to uphold the Centre’s power to notify any stretch of land as a national highway.

How does this judgment varies from its earlier one?

- The court has previously ordered **Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board (2006)** about the acquisition of lands.
- It laid a general principle that before acquiring land for development, possible adverse environmental impact should be properly comprehended & acquisition should be done in a way that does not impair environment.
- The present verdict is in variation from this principle.

- It is debatable whether clearances need to be obtained before or after the lands were notified for acquisition.
- But a holistic view needs to be taken for sustainable development rather than development-centric view.

Source: The Hindu

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