

TN: Never told centre to drop Madurai-Thoothukudi rly line

Min Sivasankar refutes union rly min's claims, says state wanted the project

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Chennai

THE Tamil Nadu government, in a statement, has clarified that it never indicated in any form that it did not want the Madurai-Thoothukudi (via Aruppukottai) railway line project.

"The Tamil Nadu Government had neither in writing nor verbally, sought for the project to be withdrawn. On the contrary, it has been consistently urging the implementation of the project," the statement by Transport Minister S S Sivasankar, said.

Questioning why the union railway minister would make statements contradictory to the state's stand, it stated that this shows the discriminatory nature of the BJP-led centre towards Tamil Nadu.

The government said that in a reply sent by the Southern Railway's deputy chief engineer to an additional secretary of the state's transport department in December 2024 regarding the status of various railway projects, the official said that while the 18-km stretch from Milavittan to Madurai was completed in March 2022, the Southern Railway has proposed the "freezing" of the rest of the 143.5-km-long Madurai-Thoothukudi line due to "low freight prospects".

Based on the assessment and request thereof by the railways, the process of land acquisition for the estimated 926 hectares was taken up in two phases by the district collectors of Madurai, Virudhunagar and Thoothukudi to be handed over to the railways. For this, the state

government, by way of three GOs issued on 24-1-2022, 25-4-2023 and 22-09-2023, accorded administrative sanction, the statement said.

It added that there has been no response from Southern Railway so far, to the letters from the collectors of these three districts (written on 9-8-2024, 4-9-2024 and 27-9-2024) seeking allotment of funds.

The chief minister, on August 19, 2024, also wrote to the union railway minister seeking allocation of funds for projects including the Madurai-Thoothukudi (via Aruppukottai) railway line project.

Earlier in the day, the DMK's IT wing also accused the union minister of 'blatantly lying' in a series of posts on social media platform 'X'. The party's IT wing released some documents to refute Vaishnav's remarks and assert that the project was shelved by the union government for "frivolous" reasons despite the state government's repeated pleas for expeditious implementation of the project.

"Honourable Railway Minister is either lying or is being lied to," it said, and urged the minister to issue a correction if his comment on Friday was a "slip of the tongue". "We need funds, not lies," it added.

The ₹2,054-crore worth project, announced in 2011-12, has been under construction since 2016. TNIE had reported based on RTI responses about how the land acquisition unit set up by the state government in Madurai for the project was disbanded on January 1. On Friday, in response to a question by TNIE, Vaishnav said, "The Tamil Nadu government has said they do not want this project," but did not elaborate further.



A screen grab of the report that appeared in TNIE edition dated January 12 (Saturday)

BJP to stage stir on Jan 20

Virudhunagar: After Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav recently announced that the new railway line project has been shelved due to opposition from the state government, TN BJP chief K Annamalai announced a massive protest against the DMK government in Aruppukottai on January 20. In a post on X, he stated that the railway minister recently said that of the 3,389 hectares of land required for various railway projects in TN, only 26% had been acquired by the DMK government.

TN supports project: MP

Virudhunagar: Virudhunagar MP Manickam Tagore rebutted Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav's statement attributing the delay of the Madurai-Thoothukudi broad gauge railway line project to the state government and noted that the state government offered support through land acquisition. In a letter to PM Narendra Modi, Tagore stated that TN government had raised the issue of funding with the central government on several occasions. However, centre is yet to allot funds raising concerns about whether withholding funds are aimed at derailing the project.

SpaDex sats 230 metres apart, health normal: Isro

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Bengaluru

THE Indian Space Research Organisation on Saturday corrected the drift anomaly between the two Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) satellites by closing the distance between them to 230 metres.

This puts the two satellites, SDX01 (the chaser) and SDX02 (the target) on the way to the much-awaited docking, although ISRO did not specify when that would happen.

ISRO took to X on Saturday evening, stating, "Arrested at Inter Satellite Distance (ISD) of 230m, all sensors (of SDX01 and SDX02) are being evaluated. Spacecraft's health is normal."

Successful docking — wherein one spacecraft attaches to the other to facilitate transfer of astronauts, supplies and equipment — is crucial for future space missions, especially with ISRO planning India's own space station by 2035 and future manned lunar missions by 2040. The docking between SDX01 and SDX02 was initially scheduled to take place on January 7. However, while making the manoeuvre to reach 225m from the then distance of 500 metres between satellites, the drift was found to be "more than expected, post non-visibility period". The planned docking was then postponed.

ISRO then scheduled the docking some time on January 9, but found the inter-spacecraft distance to be 1.5km and put them on a hold mode. The



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'Drift was more than expected'

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The SpaDeX mission, undertaken at the cost of ₹375 crore, was launched by ISRO's PSLV-C60 rocket on December 30 night from Sriharikota.

EXPRESS READ

2 migrants found dead on railway tracks

Bhubaneswar/Balangir : Two Odia labourers, who were on their way to Kerala for work, died after falling from a train near Chennai on Friday night. The migrant workers have been identified as Umesh Pandey and Kunu Banchhor, both in their early 20s, who belonged to Hatiasalapada under Town police limits of Balangir district. Their bodies were found on the railway tracks near Perambur railway station by some locals and they informed the government railway police. Through their Aadhaar cards, police found out their identity and informed family members. ENS

Police recover K'taka naxals' buried weapons

Chikkamagaluru: Jayapura police on Friday recovered weapons that were buried in a forest near Kittaleguli village in Chikkamagaluru district by six Naxals, who surrendered before CM Siddaramaiah in Bengaluru a few days ago. SI Ambareesh of Jayapura PS said one AK 56 assault rifle, three 303 rifles, one 12th bore single barrel gun, and one country-made pistol were recovered from the forest based on a tip-off. The police also recovered an empty magazine, 11 bullets of AK 56 rifle, 133 bullets of 303 rifle, 24 12 bore cartridges, and 8 bullets of pistol. ENS

Sexual abuse of Kerala girl: 14 held under Pocso

JAISON WILSON @Pathanamthitta

A total of 14 people have been arrested, in connection with the alleged sexual abuse of a Dalit minor girl by over 60 people in Chennerkara, Pathanamthitta. Police said that five cases—two in Elavumthitta police station and three in Pathanamthitta—have been registered so far in connection with the sexual abuse, with more likely to follow.

Based on the statements from the victim, who has allegedly been subjected to abuse multiple times since the age of 13, starting from her boy-

friend and more than 60 others, Elavumthitta police arrested five accused on Friday. Those arrested included - Subin, 24, S Sandeep, 30, V K Vineeth, 30, K Anandu, 21, and Sreeni alias S Sudhi Sreeni, 24, all residents of Chennerkara. Those taken into custody by Pathanamthitta police on Saturday include Shammad (20), Afzal (21), his brother Ashik (20), Nidhin Prasad (21), Abhinav (18), Karthik (18), Sudhish (27), and Appu (31). The ninth individual is a 17-year-old boy.

According to the police, when the girl, who is an athlete was 13, the son

of her father's friend named Subin, lured her by showing obscene visuals on his mobile phone. He also took the girl's nude pictures on his phone. When the girl was 16, Subin took her to a secluded rubber plantation in Achankottumala locality and assaulted her sexually. She was also abused in a shed near her home at around 2 am in another instance. He also recorded videos of the act on his phone. This was followed by regular sexual abuse, the police said.

The probe revealed that the visuals were shared among Subin's friends, who also abused her sexually.

BJP undecided about fighting Erode bypoll

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THE opposition party is afraid that it may not even retain its deposit if it contested in the bypoll, Bharathi said.

The BJP-led NDA coalition, however, is yet to announce its position on the by-election. In the previous Vikravandi bypoll, PMK candidate, which holds substantial influence in the region, was fielded on behalf of the NDA alliance. In the 2023 Erode (East) bypoll, the BJP supported the AIADMK candidate as both the parties were in alliance at the time. This time, if the NDA decides to contest, the BJP may field its own candidate. However, it is also noteworthy that the TMC, which is part of the NDA, put up a strong challenge in the 2021 assembly elections in the Erode East seat, largely due to AIADMK's backing.

The NTK, which normally fields candidates in all elections, is expected to announce its candidate soon. With the principal opposition party choosing to abstain and the BJP still undecided, many political observers opine that the DMK's victory in this bypoll seems a foregone conclusion.

Political analyst Tharasu Shyam said the AIADMK's decision to boycott the election, however, may not demoralise its cadre. Drawing a parallel with the party's previous boycott of the Vikravandi bypoll, he pointed out that AIADMK workers remained active in opposing the DMK through various agitations even after the poll boycott. He also noted that the decision could be a tactical move as both M Karunanidhi and J Jayalalitha had previously boycotted bypolls and later bounced back in general elections.

However, a senior AIADMK leader, speaking on the condition of anonymity, expressed reservations about the party's repeated decision to boycott elections. He argued that a bypoll, particularly before a general election, is as a crucial test for any party. "Regardless of the outcome, the party should have contested in this bypoll," he said. The decision to skip the bypoll may have been influenced by the lack of a strong alliance but confirmed that the majority of party functionaries were in favour of the boycott. Meanwhile, Shyam highlighted the dilemma faced by the BJP, which has claimed a significant increase in its vote-share in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, especially in the western region of the state.



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