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## Athirapally Hydel Electric Project

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### Why in News

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Recently, the **Kerala government** has approved the proposed **Athirapally Hydro Electric Project** (AHEP) on the **Chalakydy river** in **Thrissur** district of the state.

There are **already five dams for power and one for irrigation** and it will be the seventh along the 145 km course of the Chalakydy river.

### Chalakydy River

- It **originates in the Anamalai region of Tamil Nadu** and is joined by its major tributaries Parambikulam, Kuriyarkutti, Sholayar, Karapara and Anakayam in Kerala.
- The river **flows through Palakkad, Thrissur and Ernakulam** districts of Kerala.
- It is the **4<sup>th</sup> longest river in Kerala** and one of very few rivers of Kerala, which is having **relics of riparian vegetation** in substantial level.  
A **riparian zone** is the interface between land and a river or stream. Plant habitats and communities along the river margins and banks are called **riparian vegetation**, characterized by hydrophilic plants.
- It is the **richest river in fish** diversity perhaps in India as it contains 85 species of freshwater fishes out of the 152 species known from Kerala only.
- The famous waterfalls, **Athirappilly Falls and Vazhachal Falls**, are situated on this river.
- It **merges with the Periyar River near Puthenvelikkara** in Ernakulam district.

### Key Points

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- The total installed capacity of AHEP is **163 MW** and the project is supposed to make use of the tail end water coming out of the existing **Poringalkuthu Hydro Electric Project** that is constructed across the Chalakudy river.
  - AHEP envisages diverting water from the Poringalkuthu project as well as from its **own catchment of 26 sq km**.
- Kerala state government has given a **no-objection certificate** (NOC) to the **Kerala State Electricity Board** (KSEB) for a period of **seven years** and has permitted it to proceed with the project's implementation.
- KSEB officials are confident that they can manage approval from the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** as it was **approved in 2012 by an Expert Appraisal Committee** (EAC) for river valley and hydro-electric projects.
  - EACs are constituted for giving environmental clearance under the **Environmental Impact Assessment** (EIA).
- **Opposition:**
  - The government's move to revive the already controversial power project has gained **opposition from various political leaders and environmentalists**.
    - KSEB **first mooted the project in 1996** but it had been **suspended** due to strong opposition by the local community backed by environmentalists and politicians with green concerns.
    - A report by the **Kerala State Biodiversity Board** pointed out in **1997** that the power project would **adversely affect the ecology** of the fragile river ecosystem at Athirappilly.
  - It is feared that it will cause people to **organise a protest on the lines of Silent Valley** in the coming days.
    - Silent Valley** was an **ecological movement** with huge mass participation that forced the Kerala government to **abandon dam construction across the Kunthri River in Palakkad** district during the **late 1970s and early 1980s**.

- **Environmental Threats:**

- Athirappally is home to some **rarest species of birds, animals and plant species** which will be impacted.
  - Apart from being home to **hornbills**, tigers and leopards, the forests also host the Nilgiri langur, the **lion-tailed macaque** and the rare Cochin forest cane turtle.
- **Fish varieties** in the Chalakudy river would be impacted.
- Around 168 hectares of **biodiversity-rich forests in the Western Ghats** would be submerged.
- **Kadar tribal settlements** in the forests will be dismantled and displaced. The move seems to be violative of the forest rights granted to the Kadars under the **Forest Rights Act, 2006**.
- It would sever the only link between the **Peechi Vazhani Wildlife Sanctuary, Thrissur and the Idamalayar basin of the Periyar river**.
- The vital **elephant corridor between the Parambikulam Sanctuary (also a tiger reserve) and the Pooyamkutty forests** would also be affected.
- On the **tourism front**, the project would **wipe out the majestic Athirappally and Vazhachal waterfalls**, which draw 0.6 million domestic and foreign tourists every year.

**Source: DTE**