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Let math not come in the way of building a steel flyover in Bangalore

Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah has decided that since 218 people want a bridge in the city, his government will go ahead with it.

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At a time when examination papers ask Class 9 students to name Virat Kohli's girlfriend, this question would not be out of place.

Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah thinks 218 (which is 73 per cent of 299) is the correct answer and hence has decided that since 218 people want the 6.7km long steel flyover in Bangalore, his government will go ahead with it. Never mind that 8,000 people turned up on Sunday to form a human chain between Basaveshwara Circle and Mekhri Circle, to say #NoSteelFlyover.

Siddaramaiah's contention is that when the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) sought suggestions from citizens on the steel flyover project in June, only 299 responded, of which 73 per cent wanted the flyover. Amazing that the authorities think that a sample size of just 299 is good enough to ascertain the mind of a city with a one crore plus population. That too, when a Rs 1,791 crore project is being planned. And just 48 hours were given to Bangaloreans to file their response.



A map of the proposed steel flyover tweeted by Bangalore development minister KJ George.

The government believes the flyover that will consume 70,000 tonnes of steel and concrete is just what the doctor ordered for Traffic Jam-uru Bangalore. That the flyover will be a boon to the 2.68 lakh vehicles that are expected to ply on the

flyover everyday. That unlike fully concrete, that will pollute during construction and take longer, the steel flyover will be ready in 24 months.

Critics of the project to which there are 25,000 signatories point to the 812 trees that will be off Bangalore's Oxygen Suppliers Group if this project takes off. The loss of such a large green cover will be a huge setback to a city that, according to Prof TV Ramachandra of the Indian Institute of Science, has already lost two in every three trees and three in every four trees in the last three decades. No wonder Bangalore is getting hot under the collar.

Citizens opposing the project say Bangalore can do without this visual monstrosity that is so devoid of aesthetics. The other criticism is that the project will only cut ten minutes of driving time to the airport for the city's elite. They say instead the astronomical amount can be better spent to build 3,600km of quality footpath or procure 9,000 buses or 40 lakh bicycles or 200 km of suburban rail that can transport 15 lakh passengers everyday.

The flyover, in other words, will further push the have nots out of the city's road space, promoting private transport over public transport. Creating two Bangalores within one Bangalore. One that struggles in public transport and traffic jams on the ground while the car-borne Bangaloreans zip past overhead. The government argues that cars moving faster (as opposed to average speed of 13 km/hour now) will cut down pollution. Besides, it promises to plant 60,000 saplings to compensate for the 812 trees that will be cut.

The determination with which the government is pushing the project through has raised doubts about the intentions. A whisper campaign is on whether the steel lobby is at work and who is benefiting from such a big project. 60 per cent of

Bangalore municipal corporation's corporators are already from a real estate background.

Aware that corruption allegations can play spoilsport especially with assembly elections 20 months away, Siddaramaiah has sought to clarify that the cost shot up because of increase in VAT on steel from 5 per cent to 14 per cent. And that the global tendering system is transparent.

Incidentally, the project was conceived in 2010 when the BJP was in power in Karnataka. That is proof that the political establishment cutting across party lines is largely myopic to a city's future and out of sync with what the citizens needs. The backers of the Congress have also propagated that much of the opposition that it suggests has been engineered now, is politically motivated, with people owing allegiance either to the BJP or the Aam Aadmi Party.

The Namma Bangalore Foundation that is backed by Rajeev Chandrasekhar, an NDA Rajya Sabha MP, has gone to court over the issue and that further buttresses the Congress argument.

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