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Panel suggests simpler eco clearance norms for infrastructure projects

Clearances under numerous rules can take years to come

Our Bureau

New Delhi, June 2 A high-power Finance Ministry panel has recommended that infrastructure projects should be subjected to much simpler environmental clearance rules.

Currently, apart from the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, projects need to get numerous clearances from rules under Sections 3, 6 and 25 of the Environment (Protection) Act 1986. The process can take several years sometimes.

The panel suggested that industrial/infrastructure projects should be allowed to bypass these rules and that the EIA Notification should be comprehensive enough to cover all the other rules.

The report was submitted to the Prime Minister before the election. Mr Jairam Ramesh is entrusted with the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF).

The panel says that the Ministry does not grant the required clearances within the prescribed timeframe. To speed up things, it has come out with a large number of recommendations.

Thus, it has called for bringing in Standardised Terms of Reference (ToR) to minimise the time taken at the 'scoping' stage for repetitive projects.

This would apply to construction of berths and jetties, widening of national highways and construction of thermal power plants of capacity less than 1,000 MW.

Another recommendation is that all expansion of roads and highways should be exempted from public hearings.

Similarly, the expansion projects of major ports, which do not require additional land acquisition, should be exempted.

The panel suggested that data requirements should be relevant to the location of the project. Also, these should be identified and the onus of proof of correctness of the information should be placed upon the applicant.

It suggested a penalty, of cancellation of the project, if the information submitted is incorrect. This, it is expected, will reduce the scope for wrong information being filed.

In what may just be a coincidence, India eased import restrictions on scrap metals this week.

A few thousand tonnes were held up with the Customs, awaiting environmental clearance after they were found to be mildly radioactive.