

## **CCI push for projects worth Rs 74,000 crore**

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NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH: Giving a major push to infrastructure and energy sector, the government in the past two months has given nod to projects worth Rs 74,000 crore which were stuck for years due to lack of various clearances.

The impetus came soon after the formation of the Cabinet Committee on Investment in January amid concerns in the government over the prolonged delays in projects ranging from oil exploration to building roads.

A key beneficiary of the CCI impetus has been the petroleum sector, where investments worth USD 13.42 billion for exploration and production activities in 40 oil blocks were held up because of objections raised by the defence ministry on account of security concerns.

The CCI, at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on 20 March, approved the conditional clearance given to five blocks, where investments to the tune of Rs 52,921 crore have already been made.

The CCI decision has paved the way for investments worth Rs 1,566 crore, an official statement said.

The processes of granting environment and forest clearances for mega projects have also been streamlined and made easier in cases such as renewal of mining leases.

“It has also been decided that no fresh Environment Clearance (EC) shall be required for a mining project at the time of renewal of mining lease, if EC was obtained under the EIA Notification of 2006,” it said.

For one time capacity expansion of 25 per cent or less, coal mining projects have now been exempted from public hearing provided that it had taken place at the time of obtaining the existing EC and the mining is confined to the existing lease area, the statement said.

The environment ministry has, through an office memorandum issued on 5 March, granted conditional exemption from getting the consent of Gram Sabha for linear projects like roads and transmission lines.

“A number of projects were getting delayed as obtaining consent of each Gram Sabha is time consuming ~ such (linear) projects are now exempt from obtaining the consent of Gram Sabha provided that the rights of the Primitive Tribal Groups/pre-agricultural communities are not affected and the state government has certified that all rights under the Forest Rights Act have been recognised and vested,” it said.

The environment ministry has also done away with the need for obtaining a separate environment clearance for mining soil/earth from borrow areas of highway projects.

It has also extended the waiver from forest clearance for building critical infrastructure involving less than five hectares of land to 22 more districts. Initially, the waiver was granted to 60 identified districts.

“ ~ this exemption has further been extended to all categories of roads and quarrying of materials used in construction of public roads,” the statement said.

The environment ministry has also brought the environment clearance procedure for Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in line with the framework prescribed for national investment and manufacturing zones under the National Manufacturing Policy.

“This would allow the state governments to delegate powers to the State Pollution Control Boards and would exempt individual units from public hearing, if the SEZ, as a whole, has undergone public hearing,” the statement said.

In the power sector, NTPC's proposed 1,980 MW project in Jharkhand's North Karanpura area, to be built at a cost of Rs 14,000 crore, pending for the past 13 years was cleared by the CCI.

NTPC and Coal India Limited were at loggerheads on the project with the latter claiming that it would lose six billion tonnes of coal underneath the project.

NTPC had claimed that it has already invested Rs 500 crore in the project.

The CCI decided, in principle, to restore the original coal linkage granted to the plant with certain stipulations.

The CCI has also cleared coal ministry's proposal to fast-track implementation of twelve projects stranded due to green clearances. These projects would free 36.97 million tonne of coal annually and bring in investment of Rs 1347.63 crore.