



Ranking of States on Faster Green Nods

For Prelims: Environment Protection Act, 1986, Environment Impact Assessment.

For Mains: Environmental Clearances (EC) procedure and related obstacles in India, ease of doing business” in India and challenges.

Why in News

The **Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change** has decided to rank states, specifically **State Environment Impact Assessment Authorities (SEIAAs)**, on the speed with which they accord **Environmental Clearances (EC)** to development projects.

- The issue of action taken to enable **“ease of doing business”**, especially in the context of “ranking of states based on the time taken in accordance with clearances” was raised in November 2021.
- The average time to grant environmental clearances in all sectors has reduced significantly from over 150 days in 2019 to less than 90 days in 2021.

SEIAAs

- The SEIAAs are responsible for providing environmental clearance for a bulk of the infrastructure, developmental and industrial projects.
- Their main purpose is to assess the impact of the proposed project on the environment and people, and to try and minimise this impact.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - It has been decided to **incentivise the states through a star-rating system**, based on efficiency and timeliness in grant of EC.
 - This is intended as a mode of recognition and encouragement as well as for prompting improvements where needed.
 - The SEIAA, which clears projects in the shortest period of time, has a high rate of clearance, and seeks fewer “essential details”, will be ranked the highest.
- **Parameters for the Rating System:**
 - SEIAAs will be graded between 0 and 1 on five parameters, and 0 and 2 on one (for granting EC).
 - **The parameters are:**
 - The average number of days taken by an SEIAA to accept proposals seeking either EC or Terms of Reference (ToR) for projects.
 - The number of complaints addressed by the Authority.

- The percentage of cases for which site visits are carried out by either SEIAAs or State Expert Appraisal Committees (SEACs).
- The percentage of cases in which the Authority seeks additional information from project proponents more than once.
- The disposal percentage of proposals seeking fresh or amended ToRs that are older than 30 days.
- The disposal percentage of proposals seeking fresh or amended EC that are older than 120 days.
- **Criticism of the Move:**
 - **Reduce the SEIAA to a 'Rubber Stamps Authority':**
 - Such a rating system stands to reduce the SEIAA to a 'rubber stamps authority' where their performance will be judged by the speed with which they facilitate environmental degradation and jeopardising of community livelihoods.
 - **Against Article 21:**
 - The rating system is also against the environmental rule of law, [violates article 21](#) of the Constitution (Protection of Life and Personal Liberty) and is an arbitrary exercise of power to benefit only business at the cost of the environment and people.
 - **Constrain the Mandate of the SEIAAs:**
 - The move will **severely constrain the mandate of the SEIAAs** under the [Environment Protection Act, 1986](#) and the [Environment Impact Assessment notification](#).
 - This ratings system could lead to a further dilution in the quality of environment impact assessments and it only demonises the regulatory process, whereas it is the state of the economy at large which has arrested the growth of business.
 - To assess the performance of SEIAAs, the criteria for the same should step from this environmental protection mandate, which is drawn from **Section 3(3) of the Environment Protection Act**.
 - The Act empowers the Central Government to establish authorities (under section 3(3)) charged with the mandate of preventing environmental pollution in all its forms and to tackle specific environmental problems that are peculiar to different parts of the country.

Environmental Clearance In India

- In India Environmental clearance of a project has to be obtained either from the **State Government and /or from the Central Government**.
- The basic objective behind the environmental clearance is to **ensure the least damage to the natural resources** and incorporate suitable remedial measures right at the stage of project formulation.
- The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) notification issued by the Ministry of Environment & Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) includes the details of the procedure for obtaining Environmental Clearance and public hearing for decision making.
- This EIA notification is valid for both Government as well as the Public sector/Private sector for mega projects undertaken by them.
- The potential impacts of proposed projects, plan programs, or legislative actions relative to the physical-chemical, biological, cultural, and socio-economic components of the total environment.

Way Forward

- Though the philosophy of the **Environmental Impact Assessment is most essential to protect the environment** and keep a balance between the ecology and the economy, development, and pollution, it is **necessary to revamp the time taking stages** as it has become a major obstacle in starting a business in India.
- In the last couple of years administrative and bureaucratic issues that have come up have made it difficult for the local investors to invest.

[Source: IE](#)

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