

Standing Committee Report Summary

Expediting and Simplifying the Environment and Forest Clearance Process for Coal Mining Projects

- The Standing Committee on Coal, Mines and Steel (Chair: Mr Anurag Thakur) presented its report on 'Expediting and Simplifying the Environment and Forest Clearance Process for Coal Mining Projects' on December 10, 2025. Environmental Clearance (EC) for coal mining projects is required under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006. Forest Clearance (FC) is a mandatory requirement under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 for diversion of forest land for non-forest use, including coal mining operations. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:
 - **Approvals at state level:** Coal mining requires prior ECs depending on the size of the mining lease area. Projects exceeding 500 hectares are appraised at the central level, while those of less than 500 hectares are appraised by the respective state authorities. The Committee noted that since 2022, only 12 ECs have been granted for projects below 500 hectares.
 - **Time taken for approvals:** The average time taken to grant ECs to Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) is 15 to 18 months, while for commercial coal blocks, it is around 26 months. The average time taken for FC approvals is 24 to 30 months for PSUs and up to 34 months for commercial coal blocks. The Committee recommended improving coordination between various approving authorities and reducing the difference in average time taken between public and private sectors.
 - **Permissions outside single window clearance:** The Single Window Clearance System (SWC) aims to streamline the process of approvals required for operationalisation of mines. The PARIVESH portal provides a single-window online platform for processing environment, forest, wildlife, and coastal regulation zone clearances. The Committee noted that various clearances systems continue to operate separately. These include approvals from Directorate General of Mines Safety, Central Ground Water Authority, and Water Resources Department. It recommended that permissions being handled through separate processes be brought under the single-window framework.
- **Creation of land banks:** Compensatory Afforestation (CA) refers to afforestation undertaken in lieu of diversion of forest land for non-forestry use under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. The Committee noted challenges in the identification and transfer of CA land. It further observed that the cost of CA per hectare varies significantly across states, ranging from Rs 9 lakh to Rs 22 lakh. The Committee recommended that states create pre-identified land banks of degraded forest and non-forest land suitable for CA.
- **Digitalisation of land records:** The Committee noted that process for issuing land diversion orders and tree felling permissions is governed by state-specific laws, leading to delays. It further observed that updated and accurate state forest records are necessary for expediting ECs and FCs. The Committee recommended that states publish digitised land maps clearly distinguishing recorded forest, deemed forest, non-forest land, and deemed community forests.
- **Delays in Gram Sabha approvals:** Approval of Gram Sabha, obtained through public consultations, is mandatory for securing ECs and FCs. The Committee noted that delay in getting clearance by Gram Sabhas is one of the common causes cited for delay in granting FCs. These delays may arise due to coordination challenges across multiple districts, management of local objections, and the need to align schedules of various authorities. It recommended development of a standardised protocol for Gram Sabha resolution and verification process to expedite the process. It also recommended allowing hybrid modes of public hearings to reduce delays.
- **Promoting underground mining:** The Committee noted that underground mining projects reduce surface disturbance, help preserve land and forests, lower land reclamation costs, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It recommended policy simplification and standardisation of mining practices for underground coal mining.

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