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## **FM panel suggests simpler EIA for infrastructure projects**

*Friday, 05 Jun, 2009*

BL reported that 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 Notification, projects need to get numerous clearances from rules under Sections 3, 6 and 25 of the Environment Act 1986. The process can take several years sometimes.

The panel suggested that industrial and 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 panel said 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 Standardized Terms of Reference to minimize 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 added 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.

(Sourced from Business Line)

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