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Performance Appraisal of Environmental Clearance in Haryana, 2016

Mining of Minor Minerals form the major part of the Environmental Clearance process in the State of Haryana. Given the high level of air pollution in the State, the grant of environmental clearance to minor minerals which includes cluster mining will lead to further decline in the air quality as well as put stress on water resources. SEIAA and SEAC carried out appraisal in the most casual manner without any consideration to the likely impact on water and air quality. There are many problematic issues which needs to be dealt at a more policy level eg. the SEIAA stipulates the use of fly ash for building construction. Given the fact that flyash is toxic, there is a need to review this standard condition imposed by SEIAA. Overall, the manner in which projcts are considered by the SEAC and SEIAA reveals lack of 'detailed scrutiny', which is a mandatory requirement of the EIA Notification, 2006

Located in part within the National Capital Region and the Indo Gangetic Plains, the State of Haryana has high ambient air pollution levels. The role of SEIAA and SEAC is critical in ensuring that the any new project and expansion of existing one does not lead to significant increase in air pollution. In the year, 2016, a total of 184 different projects were considered by SEIAA in 13 meetings out of which 96 projects were granted environmental clearance and only one project was rejected on the ground of incomplete information submission. It is clear that the appraisal procedure had hardly given any significance to either environmental parameters or baseline environmental quality. Granting of environmental clearances to 21 projects of mining of minor minerals and 111 building construction projects establishes the inter-linkage between the raw materials required for the building construction and end products. However, the need for cumulative impact assessment has not been discussed while appraising any of these projects. Neither the proponents were asked to carry out further study on this. It seems that, the expert members of SEAC have remained blissfully ignorant to the Column 9 of Form I of EIA Notification 2006.

The minutes of meeting does not reflect whether due importance was given to the existence of District Survey Report while considering appraisal of minor minerals, which was mandated vide S.O.141 (E) dated 15.01.2016. The issue of fugitive dust emission from the mining of brick earth is overlooked by just merely mentioning the need for covering up of the area. In absence of any mention about the maximum height of the covering, there is likely chance that the proponent might follow an escape route as many as possible and dust emission continues to pollute the surrounding air. The entire analysis revealed that the decision of SEIAA in most of the instances is in concurrence with the observations of SEAC. SEIAA without any discussion and deliberation accepted the recommendations of the SEAC. The discussion on air pollution issue was restricted to the water sprinkling, dust suppression, adequate green belt and diesel generator set and so on and it is irrespective of the type and scale of project that has been assessed.

The present analysis has been carried out to study and understand the trend of Environmental Clearance being granted by SEIAA. The analysis includes a comprehensive study of each project (sector wise) before SEIAA, from January 1, 2016 till December 31, 2016, seeking clearance and the factors of the project that SEIAA and SEAC have considered prior to grant of the clearance.

A total of about 184 different projects were considered by SEIAA in the State of Haryana in the year 2016 from January to December. 96 out of 184 projects were granted Environmental Clearance and 1 project was rejected on the ground of furnishing incomplete project related documentation. Only one project, “Sant Nirankari Mandal Hospital, Dheerpur Scheme Phase-1, Haryana”, discussed in the 31st Meeting dated 19.04.2016 was delisted due to the air pollution problem. The project proponent in the said case could not produce the fresh baseline data for ambient air quality as desired by SEAC. The project was delisted and the proponent was asked to submit complete information including baseline data online.

SECTOR SPECIFIC ANALYSIS

MINOR MINERALS

A total of 21 projects out of 184 projects were appraised under the category of mining of minor minerals. Out of the total 21 projects, 20 projects were given clearances, where as only one cluster of project (118 Proposals) relating to mining of brick earth was deferred to DEIAA/DEAC. Not a single project was rejected by SEIAA or SEAC. Minor minerals included mining of Brick Earth, Boulder, Gravel and Sand. Minor minerals appraised as Item no.1 (a), Category B-1 Project under the EIA Notification, 2006. In case of mining of “Brick Earth” in the state of Haryana, the applications could not be appraised as there was no set procedure and the requirement of EC was challenged in the NGT. In pursuance to NGT order, MoEF & CC, GoI amended Notification SO 141 (E) dated 15.01.2016 had prescribed procedure for granting environmental clearance to the mining projects having project area less than 5 Ha. As per this amended Notification the 118 applications pending with SEIAA now require environment clearance from the DEIAA/DEAC under category B2. Hence the 118 proposals were transferred to DEIAA/DEAC.

It has been stipulated in the conditions that "Data on ambient air quality and stack emissions shall be submitted to Haryana Pollution Control Board once in six months carried out by MOEF/NABL/CPCB/ Government approved lab". However, the necessity of stack emission in case of minor minerals cannot be justified. This shows the general nature of the conditions stipulated by SEIAA for the different categories of industries, without much verification and focus on the project of concern.

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TOWNSHIP AND AREA DEVELOPMENT

Township & Area Development project is appraised as item no. 8(b) under category 'B1' under the EIA notification, 2006. Building construction projects whose total built up area is more than 1,50,000 sgmt is appraised as Township & Area Development project. A total of 10 projects out of the 184 projects were for Township & Area Development project. Out of the 10 projects, 4 projects were granted clearance and for one project the validity of EC was extended and 5 other projects were deferred to SEAC for conducting site inspection.

The clearance conditions stipulate the use of fly ash as building material would entail emission of fugitive dust during transportation of fly ash thereby causing air pollution. Further, the condition lacks information on the sources of fly ash from where it will be transported to the project site. In the absence of that information, it is impossible to predict the likely impacts to be taken place from the transportation of fly ash. The appropriate specific measures to be undertaken by the project proponent to control construction dusts like silica and non-silica dust have not been specified. It is important to note here that silica dust is hazardous when very small (respirable) particles are inhaled. These respirable dust particles can penetrate deep into the lungs and cause disabling and sometimes fatal lung diseases, including silicosis and lung cancer, as well as kidney disease. (https://www.osha.gov/dsg/topics/silicacrystalline/). Dust suppression spray system is one such measure which can reduce silica dust generation It has been stipulated in the specific conditions that the project proponent will take proper mitigation measures to control the green house effects, radiation effects, ozone depletion effects and acid rain effects during the building construction phase and operation phase of the project. But the definitive measures to be taken by the project proponent in this case have neither been stipulated by the SEIAA or SEAC.

COMMON EFFLUENT TREATMENT PLANT

Common Effluent Treatment Plant is appraised under Item no.7 (h) category 'B1' project. A total of 4 proposals were considered for setting up of CETPs, out of which 2 were approved and 2 were deferred as SEIAA directed a sub-committee of SEAC to undertake site inspection and place their finding before SEIAA. There was no discussion with respect to air emissions despite the fact that air emissions are significant from CETP. According to a study, titled "Air Emissions at a Wastewater Treatment Plant", the common effluent treatment plant emits volatile organic carbon (VOC) and pathogens into the atmosphere, especially at sites of gaseous releases or mechanical agitation, such as denitrification, aeration, mechanical oxidation, or at the exit of pipe transport. There is no mention of monitoring systems in the conditions or mentioned during the meetings, to monitor the emission of VOCs into the environment, a group of compounds known to be carcinogenic in nature. It is important to note here that VOCs have harmful effect on the environment and human health as well as other adverse physiological effect. It has the potential to cause photochemical ozone at ground level and damage to stratospheric ozone as well. Various forms of VOCs are responsible to cause irritation to skin and mucous membranes; various toxic and neurological effects; carcinogenicity, teratogenicity and mutagenicity. VOCs do have direct and indirect adverse effects on plants and animals, with general implications for the well being of natural ecosystems. VOCs which are persistent in nature have the potential to remain in the ecosystem for long and can pass through numerous possible environmental pathways, for example via sewer atmospheres or through contamination of the natural water cycle.

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