

## Green ministry plans exempting strategic projects from long-drawn clearance process

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In 2014, the Centre gave a 'general approval' to allow diversion of forest land for constructing two-lane roads within 100 km of LAC in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

New Delhi: The Union Environment ministry has begun looking at freeing up and possibly even exempting defence and strategic projects completely from the existing green clearance regime. The deliberations on the issue comes amid India's standoff with China on the line of actual control, where infrastructure projects have been delayed as environment approvals have taken years. The deliberations on the issue comes amid India's standoff with China on the line of actual control, where infrastructure projects have been delayed as environment approvals have taken years. The deliberations on the issue comes amid India's standoff with China on the line of actual control, where infrastructure projects have been delayed as environment approvals have taken years.

Discussions have begun to have a separate protocol for defence projects and infrastructure in view of the confidential nature of such proposals, top officials confirmed to ET. The idea is to allow such projects to be evaluated for environmental impact by defence and strategic agencies through their own mechanisms instead of seeking clearances of the green ministry. The special protocol and exemption, however, will be permitted only after the home and defence ministries certify a project as 'strategic'.

"It is felt that seeking environment ministry's multiple clearances should be done away with for defence and strategic projects in view of the sensitivities involved and the confidentiality clauses. We are instead looking at a system where the defence/strategic user agencies can ensure environmental compliance through own mechanisms, conduct environmental impact assessments and apprise the environment ministry of the same. Preliminary discussions on the same have been initiated," an official involved in the deliberations told ET.

"The key point here is that strategic and defence projects should not be held up for procedural reasons. While we have relaxed norms for defence projects, it is felt more needs to be done to allow timely project execution in such cases," the official added. MHA and MoD have repeatedly taken up with the environment ministry the issue of easing green norms for critical border infrastructure. In 2014, the Centre gave a 'general approval' to allow diversion of forest land for constructing two-lane roads within 100 km of LAC in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. Following the Doklam standoff in 2017, MoEF waived further forest clearances for Army infrastructure projects within 100 km of LAC. However, even with these relaxations, the average time for forest and wildlife approvals ranged from 2-7 years, as per MoD records submitted to the standing committee on defence in February 2019.

## Special Protocol and Exemption



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Responding to a query on time required for wildlife clearance from proposal stage to final clearance and the average time taken by MoEF for giving wildlife clearance, MoD told the panel “the average time taken for obtaining wildlife clearance is 3 to 7 years”. On time required for environment clearance, it said “BRO is exempted by Ministry of Environment and Forest from obtaining environment clearance. However, the time taken for forest clearance vary from case to case and state to state. The average time taken for obtaining forest clearance is 2 to 5 years.”

Source: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/green-ministry-likely-to-lose-power-to-clear-border-strategic-projects/articleshow/76590382.cms>