

Mining fails to start due to delay in forest nod

The delay is causing revenue loss to the state exchequer and to the lease holders as well.

Ambika Sharma, Solan, January 15



Inordinate delay in securing forest clearance by lessees for undertaking mining activities is delaying their operations and causing revenue loss to the state exchequer and to them as well. According to the Forest Conservation Act 1980, clearance is mandatory for undertaking non-forestry activities such as mining on forestland. Since most of the waste and degraded sites, which have been identified for mining, have been categorised as forestland, the clearance is mandatory for all lessees to secure mining lease.

The lessees also have to undertake an environment impact assessment and submit a mining plan to the department following which they are issued a letter of intent for initiating mining. In Sirmaur, the department has identified 17 sites from which 25 per cent royalty was secured recently. In the last three years, 23 sites owned by the government were auctioned but mining was being done only on one site owned by the Revenue Department, as it did not require the forest clearance. In all other 22 sites, the lessees are yet to secure forest clearance and despite depositing 25 per cent of the lease amount and 25 per cent as security nearly three years ago, they could not begin mining activities, says Assistant Geologist Sarit Chandra. The delay in securing forest clearance owing to the cumbersome procedure is discouraging the lessees, who have also approached the state government for help. Since they have deposited 50 per cent of the lease amount running into crores of rupees, they are frustrated over the delay. The officials concerned are trying to auction all sites owned by the state government but at some places no site has been auctioned due to the tedious work of clearances. It is known that in Bilaspur district not even one site has been auctioned as no person has come forward while in Sirmaur district the officials concerned have tried to auction sites thrice. Randeep Singh, who had secured a lease for mining on 54 hectares in 2016 and deposited Rs 2.50 crore as premium, is yet to secure the forest clearance. He told The Tribune that the delay was causing revenue losses to him and the government as well; he is to give 10 per cent increased revenue every year. He said despite it being government land he had to secure an NOC from the gram sabha, which took a year, and the subsequent procedure such as obtaining clearance under the Forest Rights Act from the Deputy Commissioner also involved several modalities which took nearly two years. He added that he had to seek two annual extensions to secure all clearances and if he is unable to complete these by August 2020, his money would be forfeited. His case was sent for forest clearance in December after meeting the lengthy procedures and documentation. He said the government should notify only such sites for mining which are not in the close proximity of a wildlife sanctuary and where gram sabhas have given their consent to save investors from unnecessary hassles.

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