

Criteria & Safeguards Taken for identifying Coal Blocks near Forest Areas

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Ministry of Coal has successfully auctioned 90 coal blocks since 2018. Year-wise details of successfully auctioned coal mines since 2018 is as under:-

Year	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Coal blocks auctioned	0	4	20	19	47

While identifying coal blocks for auction by Ministry of Coal, generally the following criteria and safeguards are considered:-

- i. Coal blocks should not lie in the National Parks, Wild life Sanctuaries, ESZ, Wild Life Corridors
 - ii. Analysis of Decision Support System (DSS) of MoEF&CC.
- (iii) Mines with ongoing exploration activities or having overlap with active CBM blocks have been excluded.
 - (iv) Blocks/ mines presently under litigation have been excluded.

Tara block in Chhattisgarh's Hasdeo Arand forests and Mahan coal block in Madhya Pradesh were identified for auction in consultation with MoEF&CC. Considering environmental impact, Mahan coal block has been considered for auction for underground method of mining to safeguard ecologically sensitive area over it whereas Tara block has been considered for auction based on recommendations in Bio-Diversity study in Hasdeo-Arand Coalfield, carried out by Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), Dehradun.

Further, clearance process, viz. Forest Clearance (FC) and Environment Clearance (EC), for coal mining projects is governed by the MoEF&CC, specifically its expert appraisal committees and the statutory body known as the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC). MoE&FCC in India considers several factors, like Environmental Impact Assessment, Forest and Wildlife impact, Socio-Economic impact, Air and Water Quality, compliance with environmental regulations, public consultation, monitoring and compliance mechanism before granting clearance to a coal mining project. It is important to note that the specific factors and considerations may vary depending on the project's scale, location, and potential impacts.

The government has taken various initiatives to meet the rising energy demand of the country at the current time of global energy crisis but has also shown deep sensitivity and carefulness towards the environment by adopting various mitigation measures including extensive plantation in and around coal-bearing areas and reclamation of mined out lands. The major initiatives taken by the Ministry of Coal is given below:-

1. Greening Initiatives in the coal sector : The Ministry of Coal has set an ambitious goal for coal companies to bring more than 2400 hectares of area in and around coalfields under green cover with plantation of more than 50 lakh saplings for the year 2022-23. The greening initiatives of the coal sector support India's Nationally Determine Contribution (NDC) commitment to create an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030.
2. Compensatory Afforestation is a proven way of restoration of lands damaged by anthropogenic activities and must for achieving satisfactory rehabilitation of a mined landscape. It helps in minimizing the footprints of coal mining, prevents soil erosion, stabilizes the climate, preserves wildlife, and enhances the quality of air & watersheds.
3. Ministry of Coal has established 'Sustainability & Just Transition' division to promote environmentally sustainable coal mining in the country.
4. Promoting Eco-Tourism in mining areas
5. Promotion of Underground Coal mining

This information was given by Union Minister of Coal, Mines and Parliamentary Affairs Shri Pralhad Joshi in a written reply in Rajya Sabha today.

BY/RKP

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