

Green push to China border infra projects

Red Zone Road, Power Projects On Fast Track

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New Delhi: After giving green approval to all road projects within 100 km of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) along the India-China border, the government has decided to grant similar clearance to other strategic infrastructure, including Army stations and ammunition depots in the area. All these projects are crucial for troop movements and related activities near the border.

Environment minister Prakash Javadekar said this on Tuesday while announcing other key decisions of his ministry which will fast-track road construction and laying of electricity lines in Naxalite-affected areas.

Many road projects have been pending in 117 Maoist-hit districts due to denial of permission to divert forest land beyond five hectares. State authorities will now be able to divert more forest land for "two lane public roads", irrespective of the area of forest land involved in such projects.

The approval for diversion of forest land for transmission lines will allow power companies to install lines up to the capacity of 1200 KV without getting into the nitty-gritty of the Forest (Conservation) Act. At present, power companies can set up transmission lines only up to 220 KV.



A soldier guards a border post in Bumla, Arunachal Pradesh

Both decisions will be beneficial for Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Telangana.

Referring to his ministry's earlier decision for border road projects along the Indo-China border, Javadekar said, "Grant of similar general approval for diversion of forest land required for setting up of Army stations, ammunition depots, training centres and other support infrastructure within 100 km aerial distance from the LAC is also under consideration."

Such infrastructure also include schools, hospitals and residential quarters for defence personnel.

Though the minister did not disclose details of other projects, he emphasized that the decisions would address "the security and strategic interests of the nation". He

also referred to the massive development activities on infrastructural front across the border. The 'general' approval under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 is a kind of 'advance' approval, allowing the ministry to go ahead with such projects without approaching the environment ministry.

"The defence ministry can go ahead after getting basic ground clearance from the respective state governments under the general approval," said an official, adding the move will fast-track those projects along the 4,057 km LAC with China.

China has at least five fully-operational airbases, an extensive rail network and over 58,000-km of roads in the Tibet Autonomous Region, which makes it possible for it to swiftly move over 30 divisions (each with over 15,000 soldiers) to the LAC.