

In reverse gear: on draft EIA notification

The draft EIA notification needs wider consultation and progressive changes

The Union Ministry of Environment has been in the spotlight on more than one occasion during the pandemic, as it worked to push through retrograde environmental decisions in an atmosphere of general paralysis. In April, Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar used a virtual conference to ensure that the National Board for Wildlife's Standing Committee stamped its approval on several projects, with serious implications for conservation. He now wants to hurriedly make a fundamental change to the process of project approvals, by introducing a new Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification. Now in draft, it seeks to replace the existing EIA notification of 2006. The proposed provisions show that the Ministry has gone to great lengths to reduce or even remove public participation, and by extension independent expert opinion, from the process of granting environmental clearances; public reporting of violations may also not be taken cognisance of. While there can be no argument about the importance of development projects, it has resorted to sophistry in classifying activity for exemptions. Section 26 provides a list of projects that would not attract environmental clearance or permission, including coal mining and seismic surveys for oil, methane and shale gas on some lands. Section 14 provides exemption for these and some other projects from public consultation, also limiting the scope of public involvement to the districts concerned, in the case of national parks and sanctuaries where pipeline infrastructure will pass. Roads and highways get liberal concessions. Further, it retains the clause that if a public agency or authority considers the local situation not conducive to participation by citizens, the public consultation need not include a public hearing.

In spite of the far-reaching nature of its proposed actions, the Centre has displayed unseemly haste to get them in place and Mr. Javadekar has not aided credibility by trying to shut down public responses to the draft early. It took a Delhi High Court order to extend the deadline to August 11. The exercise has been further muddled by the mysterious blocking of some activist websites calling for the EIA proposal to be dropped, and demanding a new approach towards conserving natural resources for future generations. Clearly, the Centre's attempts at weakening checks and balances are not new. A study of coal mining clearances shows that 4,302 hectares of forest were diverted during 2014-18, favouring extraction over conservation. COVID-19 has powerfully demonstrated the value of nature for well-being: of lost forests and captured wildlife bringing virus reservoirs closer to humans and foul air destroying their health. While there might be a case for some changes, much of the proposed EIA system can only make things worse, and should not be pushed through.

1. **in reverse gear** (phrase) – in backward direction.
2. **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)** (noun) – a process of evaluating the likely environmental impacts of a proposed project or development, taking into account inter-related socio-economic, cultural and human-health impacts, both beneficial and adverse.
3. **progressive** (adjective) – forward-looking, forward-thinking, dynamic, advanced.
4. **the spotlight** (noun) – the public attention, the focus of public/media; the public eye.
5. **pandemic** (noun) – the worldwide spread of a new disease; The illness spreads around the world and typically affects a large number of people across a wide area.
6. **push through** (phrasal verb) – succeed in passing a law accepted by the people who oppose it.
7. **retrograde** (adjective) – unprogressive, negative, reverse/regressive.
8. **atmosphere** (noun) – conditions, circumstances, situations.
9. **paralysis** (noun) – shutdown, immobilization, stoppage.
10. **virtual** (adjective) – performing a task with the use of computer, especially over a network.
11. **virtual conference** (noun) – an interactive online event that brings together a group of people with similar interests or expertise so that they can learn/share information from one another.
12. **implications** (noun) – consequence/outcome, ramification, repercussion.
13. **conservation** (noun) – preservation, protection, safeguarding.
14. **hurriedly** (adverb) – quickly, hastily, rapidly.
15. **seek** (verb) – try, attempt, work towards.
16. **provision** (noun) – term, clause, requirement/condition.
17. **go to great lengths** (phrase) – to make a major effort or try very hard (to do something).

18. **by extension** (phrase) – used when you want to mention something because it is connected to something else (the other thing which has just been mentioned).
19. **take cognisance of** (phrase) – notice, attend to, take into account, give attention to.
20. **resort to** (verb) – use, utilize, turn to, have recourse to.
21. **sophistry** (noun) – trickery, deception, dishonesty, cheating; clever (but false) argument.
22. **exemption** (noun) – exclusion, relief/release, exception.
23. **seismic** (adjective) – relating to vibrations produced artificially by explosions.
24. **shale gas** (noun) – natural gas which is trapped underground in a fine-grained sedimentary rock (shale).
25. **sanctuary** (noun) – nature reserve, conservation area, protected area (for wildlife).
26. **liberal** (adjective) – non-restrictive, not strict, broad-based, general.
27. **concession** (noun) – compromise, adjustment, allowance, exception, authorization.
28. **conductive** (adjective) – good, helpful/useful, productive.
29. **public hearing** (noun) – a way to gather public opinions and concerns on political issues before a legislature, agency, or organization makes a decision or takes action.
30. **far-reaching** (adjective) – widespread, extensive, profound, important, major, significant.
31. **unseemly** (adjective) – improper, inappropriate, unsuitable; ill-advised.
32. **haste** (noun) – hurry, rush, swiftness, quickness.
33. **in place** (phrase) – established, set up.
34. **aid** (verb) – help, assist, support.
35. **credibility** (noun) – trustworthiness, reliability, integrity.
36. **shut down** (phrasal verb) – discontinue, cease activity, close/stop.
37. **muddy** (verb) – make unclear, obscure, confuse, mix up.
38. **mysterious** (adjective) – incomprehensible, confusing, baffling, perplexing, bewildering.
39. **activist** (noun) – a person who supports a political or societal change/cause.
40. **call for** (phrasal verb) – require, publicly ask/necessitate, demand.
41. **conserve** (verb) – preserve, protect, save.
42. **checks and balances** (plural noun) – a system in which all departments of a government organization have right to amend/limit the powers of the other departments in order to avoid dominance of one department.
43. **favour** (verb) – support, back, endorse, advocate, espouse.
44. **extraction** (noun) – removal/taking out, separation, obtaining, distillation (of resources from the natural environment).
45. **well-being** (noun) – healthy state, comfort/happiness, prosperity.
46. **wildlife** (noun) – (wild) animals.
47. **reservoir** (noun) – In infectious disease ecology and epidemiology, a natural reservoir, also known as a disease reservoir or a reservoir of infection, is the population of organisms (living things-plants/animals) or the specific environment in which an infectious pathogen (virus/bacteria) naturally lives and reproduces, or upon which the pathogen primarily depends for its survival.
48. **foul** (adjective) – polluted, impure, unclean, dirty.

Sudan's troubles

The continuing violence is a reminder of the task of restoring peace among ethnic groups

The massacre of over 60 people over the weekend in Sudan's Darfur region marks a further escalation in the violence blighting the territory since the 2019 ouster of the country's dictator Omar al-Bashir. About 500 armed men targeted the Masalit community in west Darfur's Masteri town, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. On Friday, 20 people, including women and children, were gunned down in a South Darfur town when displaced farmers were returning to the region under a recent government-backed agreement with the original landowners. Days earlier, Khartoum declared an emergency in the North Darfur region after a police station was burned down and vehicles set on fire by protesters in a small town and militias attacked another. These incidents are a reminder of the unfinished task of restoring stability in Darfur racked by a conflict between the nation's dominant Arab rulers and the African ethnic communities demanding greater autonomy from Khartoum. Nertiti town in central Darfur has become the epicentre of the growing opposition in the region. The mass sit-ins since June have attracted wider support from the professional classes that spearheaded the 2019 popular uprising that led to the fall of the autocratic regime of Mr. Bashir. In response to demands from women's groups for basic protection following the violence, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok has announced the deployment of additional security forces. But the continuing tensions merely reinforce concerns that the government's assurances at the beginning of this month have not translated into concrete measures.

Another key demand is the hand-over of Mr. Bashir to The Hague to be tried for genocide and atrocities in Darfur. While some officials have sounded positive on the question, top military officials in the transitional government are said to be concerned about the risk that others close to him could be implicated. Meanwhile, extraditing Mr. Bashir — now imprisoned in Khartoum — could serve as a useful trade-off for the government to restore ties with the West, have sanctions removed and attract investment. Sudan's largely young and educated population counts on advances in economic growth and guarantees of democratic freedoms to better its prospects overall. The issue will test the tenuous ties between the military and the civilian-led government and the credibility of the progress to a participatory democracy. At any rate, securing the peace in the nation's west is critical for Sudan's broader democratic transition that was set in motion last year. An immediate end to the violence in Darfur ought to be Khartoum's uppermost priority. Restoration of normalcy is also the only route to the timely conduct of democratic elections.

1. **ethnic** (adjective) – relating to a population subgroup (cultural, national, traditional/folk) with a common national or cultural tradition.
2. **massacre** (noun) – carnage, mass murder, mass killing.
3. **mark** (verb) – indicate, represent, signify, signalize.
4. **escalation** (noun) – intensification; an increase in the intensity of something.
5. **blight** (verb) – disrupt, afflict, ruin, spoil, destroy.
6. **ouster** (noun) – removal, dismissal, unseating.
7. **dictator** (noun) – autocrat, absolute ruler, oppressor.
8. **humanitarian** (adjective) – compassionate, humane, socially concerned.
9. **affairs** (noun) – concerns, matters, activities.
10. **gun down** (phrasal verb) – shoot down, kill (someone with a gun).
11. **government-backed** (adjective) – supported by the government.
12. **set on fire** (phrase) – light, ignite, set alight.
13. **militia** (noun) – armed forces, military unit, soldiery (from the civil population to support main forces).
14. **rack** (verb) – torment, afflict, torture, agonize.
15. **dominant** (adjective) – authoritative, most influential, most powerful.
16. **autonomy** (noun) – independence, freedom.
17. **epicentre** (noun) – the main/central point of something (particularly of an unpleasant or problematic situation).
18. **sit-in** (noun) – a method of protest in which people gather in a (public) place and remain there protesting continuously until their demands are fulfilled.
19. **attract** (verb) – draw, engage, cause, bring forth.
20. **spearhead** (verb) – lead, head (an movement/protest); be in the forefront of.

21. **uprising** (noun) – insurgency, revolution, rebellion.
22. **autocratic** (adjective) – undemocratic, totalitarian/authoritarian, tyrannical, oppressive.
23. **deployment** (noun) – the act of employing forces into effective action.
24. **merely** (adverb) – only, simply, just.
25. **reinforce** (verb) – increase, enhance, intensify, encourage, deepen.
26. **concrete** (adjective) – definite, specific, definitive; factual, actual/real.
27. **measure** (noun) – course of action, action, step, procedure.
28. **genocide** (noun) – mass murder, massacre, racial killing.
29. **atrocious** (noun) – act of barbarity/brutality, cruelty, inhumanity.
30. **sound** (verb) – indicate (something); give the impression of being.
31. **transitional** (adjective) – interim, provisional, temporary.
32. **implicate (in)** (verb) – involve in, concern with, associate with (a crime/wrongdoing).
33. **extradite** (verb) – to surrender a fugitive (a person who has escaped from being confined/accused of crime) from one (country's) jurisdiction to another by mutual agreements between the two countries; hand over, deport, banish/expel.
34. **imprison** (verb) – incarcerate, take into custody, detain/confine, jail, put in prison, hold captive.
35. **trade-off** (noun) – a situation in which you must choose between (balance) two things that are opposite or cannot be had at the same time; a compromise; swap, exchange.
36. **ties** (noun) – bond, association, relationship.
37. **sanctions** (noun) – action taken, or an order given to force a country to obey international laws by limiting or stopping trade with that country, by not allowing economic aid for that country, etc (Courtesy: VOA Learning English).
38. **count on** (phrasal verb) – rely on, depend on.
39. **advance** (noun) – progress, improvement, development, advancement.
40. **better** (verb) – improve, upgrade, enhance.
41. **prospects** (noun) – chances, possibilities, expectations, outlook (for success/wealth).
42. **tenuous** (adjective) – weak, fragile, shaky; insubstantial, unspecific, indefinite.
43. **credibility** (noun) – trustworthiness, reliability, integrity.
44. **participatory/participative democracy** (noun) – a form of government in which the citizens themselves have the opportunity to make decisions about public policy.
45. **at any rate** (phrase) – in any case, anyhow, anyway.
46. **transition** (noun) – change, transformation.
47. **set in motion** (phrase) – move forwards, propel/drive, start/begin.
48. **ought to** (modal verb) – must, should.
49. **normalcy** (noun) – a normal condition; normality, regularity.
50. **timely** (adjective) – opportune, prompt, convenient, well timed, appropriate.
51. **conduct** (noun) – organization, carrying out, handling.