

# Green nod no longer needed for some project survey work

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**NEW DELHI:** The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) has exempted surveys involving drilling and felling of up to 100 trees for hydro and other developmental projects in forest areas from taking prior forest clearance.

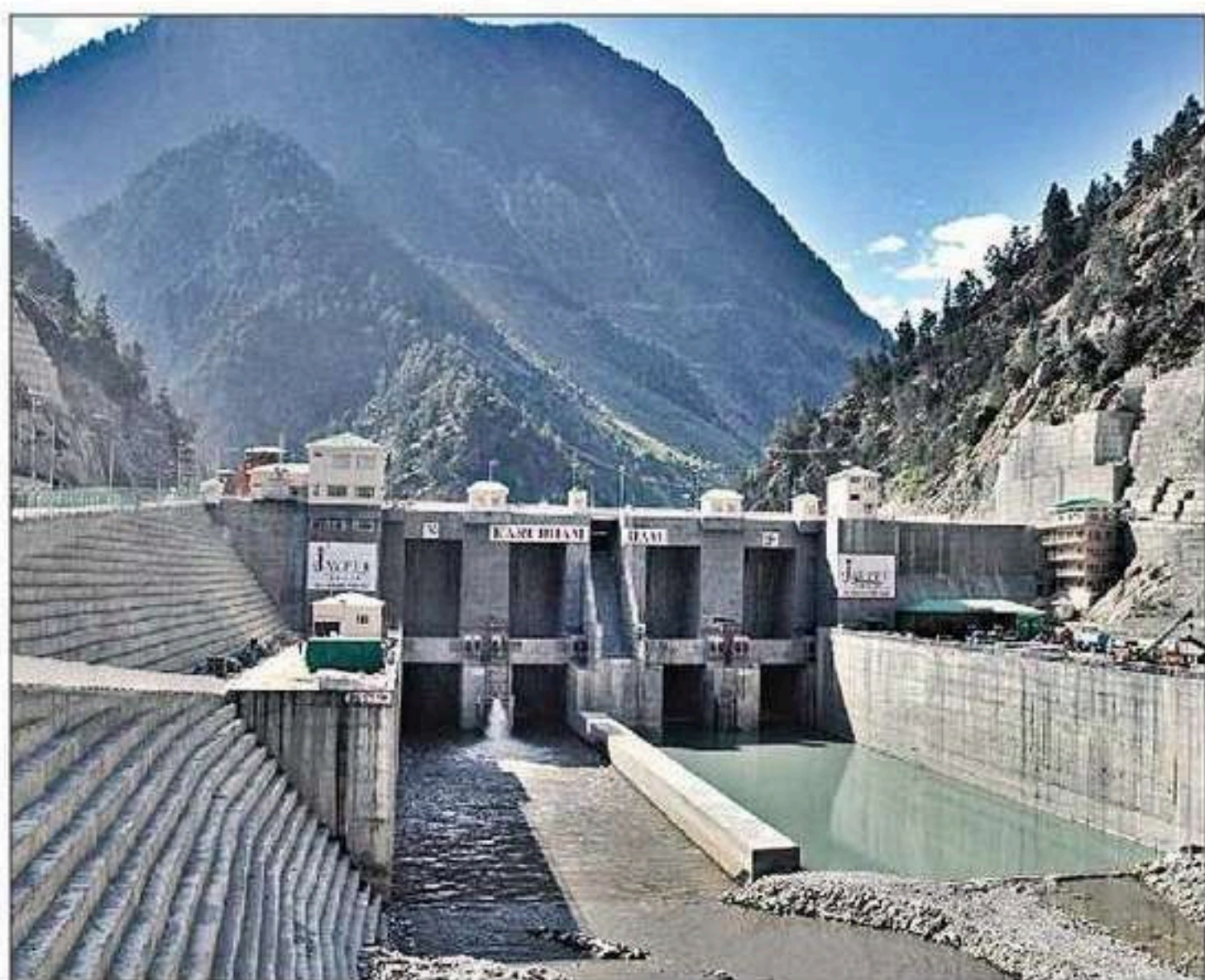
According to the minutes of FAC's meeting held on July 4, the forest panel of the ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEFCC) has observed that surveys involving drilling for hydel and other developmental projects in the forest area "are of relatively lesser intensity and does not result any permanent change in the forest land use".

"Such preliminary drilling is crucial for project design, preparation of detailed project report and estimating the financial provisions of the proposed development project," the minutes added.

The FAC further noted that survey-related drilling is a prerequisite activity for such development projects and in any case, if the finding of such drillings indicates the involvement of forest land during their project implementation, a prior forest clearance will be required.

The statutory forest body considered the matter following a request by the Union power ministry. The power ministry secretary on May 28 wrote to the MoEFCC, requesting that the dispensation provided to mining projects for drilling 25 bore holes and felling of 100 trees be extended to hydro and pump storage projects also.

The power ministry also pointed out that MoEFCC in a November 29, 2023 notification exempted survey for mining projects that include drilling of 25 bore holes of four-inch diameters per 10 sq km; felling of up to 100 trees in the entire prospecting area; and 80 shot holes of 6.5-inch diameters per square



Surveys for projects like hydel plants involve drilling and tree-felling, which normally need forest clearance.

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kilometre. For other developmental projects including hydro, the survey in forest areas is restricted to clearing of bushes and lopping of tree branches for purpose of sighting, therefore, invariably the user agency needs to abide by the entire process of approval as envisaged in the Forest Conservation Amendment Act, it further pointed out.

Hydroelectric project developers are required to carry out activities such as exploratory core drilling/drifting works, rock testing etc. for preparation of DPR. Most hydro projects are also located in ecologically sensitive river basins. Presently, there is resistance to building of multiply dams and hydro projects in Arunachal Pradesh by local indigenous people. Civil society groups, such as Siang Indigenous Farmers Forum, Dibang Resistance and North East Human Rights, have expressed concern about the 11,000 MW Upper Siang Multipurpose Storage project in the light of its possible adverse environmental repercussions.

**'White' industries exempt**

## from pollution nod

The MoEFCC, in a draft notification on July 19, has also proposed that certain categories of industries will be exempted from requirement of prior consent to establish or operate from central and state pollution control boards. The notification stated that the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 was amended (in February) with a view to exempt certain categories of industries/activities from dual compliance of consent to establish (CTE)/consent to operate (CTO) and environmental clearance.



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