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No change in ban on mining, power projects in Western Ghats

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Ecologically Sensitive Area will be demarcated after consulting States: Moily

Orders imposing restriction on new mining, thermal power and other polluting industries in the designated Western Ghats area continue to stand, Environment and Forests Minister Veerappa Moily told the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

Answering a slew of questions, he said the Ministry had issued directions under Section 5 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 “with a view to providing immediate protection to the Western Ghats and maintain environmental integrity.” Mr. Moily was referring to the orders issued by the erstwhile Environment Minister Jayanthi Natarajan. The orders under Section 5 of the green law imposed an immediate ban starting November 13, 2013, on entertaining proposals for environmental clearance pertaining to mining, thermal power plants, large building and construction projects in the Western Ghats area. The orders were conveyed to the mandatory bodies which appraise projects for environment clearance at the Centre and at the State level.

Mr. Moily said the final demarcation of the boundaries of the Ecologically Sensitive Area over the Western Ghats would be done after consultations with State governments, the process for which had been launched by writing to Chief Ministers.

The orders putting an immediate ban on new projects were passed in parallel with the in-principle approval by the Ministry of the Kasturirangan panel on Western Ghats which recommended turning 60,000 sq kilometres of the Western Ghats into an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA). Under the environment law, specific development and industrial activities can either be restricted or banned in the demarcated ESA. The Ministry had listed such activities while clarifying that plantations and other agriculture-related activities would not be affected.

But public statements of Mr. Moily days after taking over charge at the Environment Ministry about consulting Chief Ministers before implementation of the report had created confusion about the continuation of these orders. When the National Green Tribunal recently sought clarification from the Ministry in an on-going case, the Ministry had to inform that the previous orders banning new projects had not been withdrawn.

In Parliament, Mr. Moily further clarified that “Considering the seriousness of the matter, the Ministry has written on January 16, 2014 to the Chief Ministers of all six States in the Western Ghats region seeking their views on the HLWG (Kasturirangan panel) recommendations, especially on concerns which might not have been addressed in the Office Memorandum of the Ministry dated December 20, 2013.”

Indicating that the official position of the government, banning any new mining and other polluting projects even as the formal process of demarcating a final boundary of the ESA is done in consultation with the States, the Minister said, “Their [States] views have been sought within one month so that the Ministry may consider the same before issuing the draft notification for declaring the Ecologically Sensitive Area in the Western Ghats.”

Keywords: [Veerappa Moily](#), [Western ghats conservation](#), [Ecologically Sensitive Area](#), [Kasturirangan panel](#)

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