Environmental Law Newsletter





High Court Judgments / Orders

Bombay High Court permits diversion of mangrove forest for the construction of a bullet train project

National High Speed Rail Corporation v. State of Maharashtra, Judgment dated 09 December, 2022¹

The High Court of Bombay has permitted National High Speed Rail Corporation to divert mangrove forest for the construction of the Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train project. The High Court noted that the project offers several benefits by reducing the travel time between two busy business cities - Mumbai and Ahmedabad and reducing carbon footprint related to travelling. Given these benefits, this project is in public interest and has bona fide public utility. The Court also noted that although its permission is not required for laying down of railway lines, however, as mangroves are deemed forests and need to be diverted for this project, the public interest involved in the project needs to be determined by this Court. The High Court also directed the proponents to ensure compliance with all the conditions as imposed by the authorities for such a diversion.

In this case, Maharashtra Coastal Zone Management Authority had recommended the application filed by National High Speed Rail Corporation for diversion of mangrove forest within Coastal Regulation Zone-I for construction of the bullet train project between Mumbai and Ahmedabad. Court noted that the authorities had granted other permissions under environmental law to the project, including forest clearance, wildlife clearance, etc. The project proponent had approached the Court for its approval to divert mangrove forest for construction of this project in light of its earlier directions.

Madras High Court exempts Isha Foundation's yoga center from obtaining prior EC as it is an educational institution

Isha Foundation v. Union of India & Ors.; Judgment dated 14 December, 2022²

Madras High Court has exempted Isha Foundation from taking prior environmental clearance ("EC") for its group development project and yoga center. Isha Foundation had constructed a group development project with various types of residential units, school, meditation hall, etc. It claimed exemption from obtaining prior EC under the Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2006 ("EIA Notification") on the ground of being an educational institution. The High Court noted that the definition of 'educational institution' in Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000 includes a school, seminary, college, university including those things essential for mental, moral and physical development. As per this definition, educational institution does not only include a school or hostel but various other types of buildings. In this case, Isha Foundation had approached the High Court against the show notice issued to it by the Tamil Nadu State Pollution Control Board regarding the construction undertaken for the project without obtaining prior EC under EIA Notification.

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NGT directs a chemical company in Uttar Pradesh to pay INR 23 crores as environmental compensation for illegal dumping of hazardous waste

Chandni Chemicals Pvt. Ltd. v. Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board; Order dated 05 December, 2022³

The National Green Tribunal ("NGT") has directed M/s. Chandni Chemicals Pvt. Ltd. to pay INR 23 crore as environmental compensation for violating environmental norms by commencing operation of its unit without obtaining the Consent to Operate ("CTO") and disposing hazardous waste without obtaining authorisation under Hazardous Wastes (Management and Handling) Rules, 1989. This appeal was filed against the direction issued to it by Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board to pay INR 39.9 crore as environmental compensation for causing groundwater and soil contamination by dumping hazardous industrial waste containing chromium. NGT also considered the amount of environmental compensation determined by the board based on the guidelines issued by Central Pollution Control Board ("CPCB") for noncompliance with Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management and Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2016 and revised the environmental compensation payable by the appellant to INR 23 crore. It expressed displeasure over the fact that the unit had been operating since 1999 and while the board had identified violations at the unit earlier as well, no directions were issued to ensure compliance with the law. NGT observed that the appellant will also be liable under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 for violating environmental law.

NGT directs SEIAA, Uttarakhand to take all relevant studies into consideration before granting the EC for a mining project

Suraj Singh Karki v. State Level Environment Impact Assessment Authority, Uttarakhand & Ors.; Order dated 09 December, 2022⁴

NGT directed the project proponent to file relevant studies highlighting the impact of mining on seismicity and forest and wildlife in the region, before the State Level Environment Impact Assessment Authority, Uttarakhand ("SEIAA"). Until SEIAA considers them for passing a reasoned order, the EC granted to the project will remain suspended. NGT observed that SEIAA had not taken into consideration the impacts of this project on wildlife habitats and river and its viability in seismologically dangerous zone. On being asked about its view on these specific aspects, SEIAA failed to provide any response. NGT held that the EC can only be granted after due application of mind and SEIAA had not applied its mind on these two aspects. In this case, appeals were filed against the EC granted by SEIAA, Uttarakhand in favour of a project for mining soap stone in district Bageshwar, Uttarakhand.

NGT directs South Eastern Coalfields Limited to ensure compliances at its coal mining project in Chhattisgarh

Dukalu Ram & Ors. v. Union of India & Ors.; Order dated 09 December, 2022⁵

NGT has directed South Eastern Coalfields Limited to ensure compliance with the steps prescribed by the expert committee to rectify violations identified at its open-cast mine in district Raigarh, Chhattisgarh. NGT noted that the expert committee had found various noncompliances at the mine including diversion of forest land for mining; pollution caused in the course of mining and its adverse impact on crops; dumping of chemical and coal water into the fields and increasing production capacity of the mine without clearance from MoEFCC. Accordingly, NGT directed the project proponent to ensure the following compliances: resettlement and rehabilitation plan for residents; construction of road; development of green belt; providing health facilities to the villagers affected by coal mining; creation of artificial barriers to minimize air pollution and installing continuous ambient air quality monitoring instruments. While the committee also recommended environmental had compensation for these violations, appeal against its determination is currently pending before the Supreme Court. In this case, application was filed for remedial action against illegal mining in the coal blocks in district Raigarh, Chhattisgarh by Jindal Power Limited (for the period 2006-2015) and by

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South Eastern Coalfields Limited thereafter.

NGT upholds the EC for carbon black facility issued to a plant in Kutch, Gujarat

Bhavnaben Yogeshbhai & Ors. v. Union of India & Ors.; Judgment dated 12 December, 2022⁶

NGT has upheld the EC issued to Balkrishna Industries Limited by MoEFCC for the addition of a carbon black facility at its existing plant in Kutch, Gujarat. NGT observed that the public hearing was conducted as per the procedure prescribed in the EIA Notification, the project proponent had duly addressed all concerns raised during the hearing and the Expert Appraisal Committee had expressed its satisfaction regarding the compliances by the project proponent with the conditions prescribed in the earlier EC. However, noting the lack of details provided in the appraisal procedure regarding the manner in which issues raised during the public hearing were addressed by the project proponent, NGT directed MoEFCC to advise all expert appraisal committees to record the appraisal of concerns expressed during the public hearing process and the steps taken by the proponents to address them in adequate detail.

NGT imposes environmental compensation of INR 25 crore on a chemical company in UP

Heilgers Chem Pvt. Ltd. v. Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board; Order dated 15 December, 2022⁷

NGT has directed M/s. Heilgers Chem. Pvt. Ltd. to pay INR 25.5 crore as environmental compensation for violating environmental norms by commencing the operation of its unit without obtaining CTO and isposing hazardous waste without obtaining authorisation under Hazardous Wastes (Management and Handling) Rules, 1989. This appeal was filed against the directions issued by Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board against M/s. Heilgers Chem Pvt. Ltd. to pay INR 53.3 crore as environmental compensation for causing environmental damage by illegal dumping of hazardous waste containing Chromium. NGT also considered the amount of environmental compensation determined by the board based on the guidelines issued by CPCB for non-compliance

with Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management and Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2016 and revised the environmental compensation payable by the appellant to INR 25.5 crore. It expressed displeasure over the fact that the unit had been operating since 1995 and while the board had identified violations at the unit earlier as well, no directions were issued to ensure compliance with the relevant law. NGT also observed that the appellant will be liable under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 for violating environmental norms.

NGT directs CPCB to issue guidelines for the regulation of potential environmental pollution from poultry farms

National Egg Coordination Committee & Ors. v. Union of India & Ors.; Order dated 16 December, 2022⁸

NGT has refused to modify its earlier orders, where it had directed CPCB to ensure effective regulatory regime having regard to the potential for huge damage to environment caused by poultry farms. While CPCB issued guidelines prescribing environmental approvals applicable for farms with above 25000 birds, NGT directed it to cover farms with above 5000 birds. NGT observed that poultry farms with above 5000 birds have the potential to cause significant pollution and thus they need to be regulated in light of the precautionary and sustainable development principles. In this case, Supreme Court had permitted the applicants to approach NGT for the modification of its earlier order after considering all relevant aspects.

NGT imposes environmental compensation against the State of Telangana for proceeding with the construction of lift irrigation projects without prior EC

D. Chandramouleswara Reddy & Ors. v. Union of India & Ors.; Judgment dated 22 December, 2022⁹

NGT has directed State of Telangana to pay environmental compensation of INR 528 crore in respect of Palamuru-Ranga Reddy Lift Irrigation Scheme and INR 92.85 crore in respect of Dindi Lift Irrigation Scheme. NGT noted that State of Telangana is constructing

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these projects as composite projects to supply water for both irrigation as well as drinking to the people of Telangana. While the State Government had applied for EC for Palamuru-Ranga Reddy Lift Irrigation Scheme, no such application was made for Dindi Lift Irrigation Scheme project. However, the State proceeded with the construction of both the projects without first obtaining the EC and has already completed almost 90% of their construction. These projects, if proceeded with without an EC will lead to unscientific and unsustainable development and ecological destruction. Hence, it should not be allowed to be continued without getting necessary clearance and conducting an environmental impact assessment.

NGT extends its stay on MoEFCC notification modifying EIA regime for smaller building and construction projects

Shashikant Vithal Kamble v. Union of India & Ors.; Order dated 23 December, 2022¹⁰

NGT has extended the stay imposed by it on MoEFCC's notification dated 14 November, 2018 concerning delegation of powers to local authorities for building and construction projects with built up area more than 20,000 sq. meters and up to 50,000 sq. meters and industrial sheds, educational institutions, hospitals and hostels for educational institutions more than 20,000 sq. meters and upto 1,50,000 sq. meters. NGT observed that the alternate mechanism does not adequately provide for conducting environmental impact of housing projects on environment. There is no requirement of compiling relevant data of carrying capacity in terms of air and water and mitigation measures on account of adverse impact of such activity on environment. It dilutes the existing mechanism of EC process and thus needs to be revisited in light of appropriate expert studies to ensure that development of any such project takes place consistently with 'precautionary' and 'sustainable development' principles. NGT noted that MoEFCC has not taken any step to file a reply or seek variation of stay imposed by NGT on the impugned notification. In this case, applicant has challenged the validity of notification dated 14 November, 2018 issued by the MoEFCC under the Environment (Protection)

Act, 1986, modifying the EIA requirement for specified construction projects.

NGT issues directions against various states and union territories to bridge the existing gaps in solid and liquid waste management

In re: Compliance of Municipal Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016 and other environmental issues¹¹

NGT has directed the Chief Secretary, Meghalaya¹² to devise models for both solid waste and sewage management and initiate special campaigns with community/media involvement in the larger interest of protecting environment and public health for prompt action. It also directed the authorities to consider setting up a centralized single window mechanism for planning and to file six-monthly progress reports before the NGT. NGT observed that the gaps in ensuring compliance with law will amount to liability of INR 109 crore but due to committed allocation of sufficient funds for sewage projects and wastewater treatment, it is not imposing such liability.

In respect of State of Mizoram¹³, NGT noted that estimated cost of remediation would be at least INR 50 crore. The Chief Secretary has stated that such an amount will be ringfenced for allocation in waste management projects. Considering such assurances, NGT directed the state to take further measures in the matter by taking innovative approach and stringent monitoring to ensure that the gaps in solid and liquid waste generation and treatment are bridged at the earliest.

Similarly, in respect of State of Kerala¹⁴, NGT refrained from levying environmental compensation against the state for the existing gaps in processing of solid and liquid waste based on Chief Secretary's assurances that the state's budget has already ring-fenced appropriate amounts for waste management projects in rural and urban areas. Additionally, for State of Manipur¹⁵, NGT imposed environmental compensation of INR 200 crore based on the polluter pays principle due to its failure to scientifically manage the liquid and solid waste in violation of the law and judicial precedents. The Chief Secretary has also been directed to submit six monthly progress reports

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with verifiable progress. In this case, NGT was considering the issue of management of solid and liquid waste by various states and union territories.

Regulatory / Policy developments

MoEFCC issues clarification regarding the validity of ECs; 13 December, 2022¹⁶

MoEFCC has issued a clarification regarding the amendment in the EIA Notification dated 12 April, 2022 concerning validity of ECs. MoEFCC received representations from various stakeholders seeking clarity on the validity of ECs for different development projects pursuant to the amendment in the EIA Notification. Hence, MoEFCC has clarified that the validity of ECs which had not expired on 12 April, 2022 shall stand automatically extended to the increased validity period provided in the notification. Similarly, projects for which proponents have submitted application for extension of validity as on 12 April, 2022 will also stand automatically extended to their respective increased validity period depending on the type of project. The notification dated 12 April, 2022 also provided the relevant authorities the discretion to extend the validity beyond the maximum period after due consultation in exceptional cases, where an application is made to that effect.

Union Government notifies the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022; 19 **December, 2022**¹⁷

Union Government has notified the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022 to amend the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. The amendment inter alia seeks to include the provisions of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora within the domestic law; rationalise and amend Schedules in the Act from six to four; regulate the import, trade, possession or proliferation of invasive alien species; and increase the penalties for contravention of the provisions of the Act. This amendment will come into force on such date as the Union Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, decide.

MoEFCC constitutes Gujarat Coastal Zone Management Authority; 20 December, 2022¹⁸

MoEFCC has notified the constitution of the Gujarat Coastal Zone Management Authority for the purposes of protecting and improving the quality of the coastal environment and preventing, abating and controlling environmental pollution in the Coastal Regulation Zone areas in the State of Gujarat. This authority has been constituted for a period of three years.

SEBI approves stronger framework for green bonds; 20 December, 2022¹⁹

Securities and Exchange Board of India ("SEBI") has, in its board meeting, approved the amendment to SEBI (Issue and Listing of Non-Convertible Securities) Regulations, 2021 to facilitate sustainable finance while safeguarding against 'greenwashing'. It has decided to enhance the scope of definition of green debt security by including new modes of sustainable finance in relation to pollution prevention and control, eco-efficient products, etc. and introduce the concept of blue bonds (relating to water management and marine sector), yellow bonds (relating to solar energy) and transition bonds as sub-categories of green debt securities.

COP15 to UN-CBD concluded in Montreal, Canada; 20 December, 2022²⁰

The 15th Conference of Parties ("COP15") to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity ("UN-CBD") concluded in Montreal, Canada with the adoption of Kumning-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The framework covers four global goals and 23 specific targets. The overall aim of the global framework is to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030. The framework lays down the following key objectives: (a) conserve 30% of the world's land and ocean by 2030; (b) effective restoration of 30% of degraded ecosystem by 2030; (c) sustainable use, harvesting and trade of wild species; (d) halt human-induced biodiversity extinction; (e) eliminate, phase out or reform incentives, (including subsidies) that are harmful for biodiversity; and (f) regarding biodiversity finance, countries have agreed to mobilise at least USD 200 billion per year by 2030. Developed countries have agreed to

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MoEFCC amends the fly ash utilisation notification; 30 December, 2022



mobilise at least USD 20 billion by 2025 and USD 30 billion by 2030. This framework will replace the Aichi Biodiversity Targets that continued for the period 2011-2020.

MoEFCC issues guidelines regarding repair, maintenance, replacement of pipelines preceding Forest (Conservation) Act 1980; 23 December, 2022²¹

MoEFCC has issued guidelines concerning approvals required for repair, maintenance, replacement or upgradation of pipeline network installed prior to Forest (Conservation) Act 1980. It provides that the activities requiring breaking of forest land should be done after approval of the Central Government. In case where no felling of tree is involved, the prior permission of relevant Deputy Conservator of Forest must be taken which shall be subject to specified conditions.

CPCB releases the framework on environmental damage compensation; 23 December, 2022²²

CPCB has released the "Framework for Imposing Environmental Damage Compensation", for determination of cost of environmental damage caused by a polluter under the polluter pays' principle. While guidelines already exist for specific cases and sectors, this is a general framework for guiding the damage assessment and cost estimation process. Such compensation will include cost of assessments, cost of restoration and compensation for direct and indirect damages caused to human, property, flora, fauna including ecosystem functions. The framework provides a stepwise approach for preliminary assessment, identification of direct and indirect liabilities, detailed environmental and ecological studies, assessment of damages and calculation of compensation for direct and indirect liabilities. This has been released in compliance with NGT's order dated 24 April, 2019 in O.A. 606/2018.

Union Government notifies the Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act, 2022; 26 December, 2022²³

Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act, 2022 has received the assent of the President of India after being passed by the Parliament.²⁴ This Act amends the Energy Conservation Act, 2001 to *inter alia* provide for: mandated use of non-fossil sources by certain entities for their energy needs; establishing a carbon credit certificates scheme; energy conservation and sustainability code for specific commercial, office and residential buildings and state energy conservation fund. This Act will be enforced from 01 January, 2023.

MoEFCC reconstitutes Goa Coastal Zone Management Authority; 27 December, 2022²⁵

MoEFCC has notified the constitution of Goa Coastal Zone Management Authority for the purposes of protecting and improving the quality of the coastal environment and preventing, abating and controlling environmental pollution in the Coastal Regulation Zone areas in the State of Goa. The authority has been constituted for a period of three years.

MoEFCC amends the fly ash utilisation notification; 30 December, 2022²⁶

MoEFCC has amended the fly ash utilisation notification dated 31 December, 2021. This amendment *inter alia* requires (a) thermal power plants commissioned after 31 December, 2021 to achieve 100% fly ash utilisation in 5 years under the first compliance cycle and in 3 years under the second compliance cycle and onwards. These compliance targets will commence from 01 April, 2022; (b) utilisation of legacy fly ash stored before 01 April, 2022 to be fully utilised within 10 years; and (c) agencies engaged in construction activities within a 300 km radius from thermal power plant to mandatorily utilise fly ash in their activities.

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Endnotes

- 1 WRIT PETITION NO. 442 OF 2020.
- 2 W.P. 467 of 2022.
- 3 Appeal No. 14/2020 (I.A. Nos. 219/2020, 126/2022, 205/2022 and 206/2022).
- 4 Appeal No. 01/2022.
- 5 Original Application No. 200/2018 (M.A. No. 615/2018) (Earlier O.A. No. 319/2014 (CZ) and Execution Application No. 4/2019 in O.A. No. 200/2018.
- 6 Appeal No. 57(THC)/2018 (WZ).



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- 7 Appeal No. 17/2020 (I.A. No. 129/2022).
- 8 Original Application Nos. 887 and 888/2022.
- 9 Original Application No. 148 of 2021 (SZ).
- 10 Original Application No. 1017/2018.
- 11 Original Application No. 606/2018.
- 12 Order dated 22 December, 2022.
- 13 Order dated 08 December, 2022.
- 14 Order dated 01 December, 2022.
- 15 Order dated 01 December, 2022.
- 16 http://environmentclearance.nic.in/writereaddata/OMs-2004-2021/310_OM_13_12_2022.pdf
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- 25 https://egazette.nic.in/WriteReadData/2022/241450.pdf
- 26 https://egazette.nic.in/WriteReadData/2022/241524.pdf

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PRACTICE AREA EXPERTS

Pallavi Shroff

Managing Partner and National Practice Head Dispute Resolution +91 98100 99911 E: pallavi.shroff@AMSShardul.com Nawneet Vibhaw Partner - Environmental Law +91 88004 91477 E: nawneet.vibhaw@AMSShardul.com

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