

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE

RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 1324
TO BE ANSWERED ON 14.12.2023

Environmental concerns over deep sea drilling

1324. SHRI DHIRAJ PRASAD SAHU:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government is aware of the environmental concerns relating to deep sea drilling;
- (b) if so, the details of the steps taken and progress made in reducing the damage, if not, the reasons therefor; and
- (c) whether Government has considered any specific policy for extraction of rare earth metals and ensuring environmental protection, if so, the details thereof?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE
(SHRI ASHWINI KUMAR CHOUBEY)

(a) & (b) Offshore oil and gas exploration activities have environmental concerns and are regulated by Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006 and Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification, 2019 promulgated under Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. As per the provision of EIA Notification, 2006 and as amended, off-shore oil and gas development and production activities are categorized as 'Category A' project; and off-shore oil and gas exploration are categorized as 'Category B2' project".

Project activities attracting EIA Notification, 2006 and CRZ Notification, 2019 are subjected to environmental appraisal as per the provisions of the aforesaid notifications before grant of environmental clearance. Environmental safeguard conditions are prescribed in the Environmental and CRZ Clearances based on the recommendations of Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC). Compliance of prescribed conditions are monitored by Central Pollution Control Board, State Pollution Control Boards and Regional offices of this ministry.

(c) Exploration and mining of rare earth metal are reserved for government enterprises under the Atomic Mineral Concession Rules (2016). IREL (India) Limited - formerly Indian Rare Earths Limited, a central government enterprise, is authorized for rare earth minerals production in the country. Mining of rare earth metal attracts provisions of EIA Notification, 2006 and CRZ Notification, 2019.

Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) is carrying out exploration activities in the Indian Ocean for Poly-metallic nodules and poly-metallic sulphides as per the contract with International Seabed Authority (ISA). Environmental Impact Assessment and preparation of Environment Impact Statements are mandatory for the exploration of deep-sea minerals as per the guidelines of ISA. These guidelines are strictly followed by the Government of India and exploration activities are carried out for collecting the baseline environment information for the same.

The extraction of rare earth metals has not been attempted under the ongoing seabed poly-metallic nodules exploration activities of Ministry of Earth Sciences.
