

Environment authority to take over licensing function from Ministry

The proposed National Environment Protection Authority (NEPA) would ensure monitoring and compliance of environmental laws, besides taking over the licensing functions from the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

The Government will table a Bill in Parliament in the monsoon session for setting up the NEPA, said the Environment Minister, Mr Jairam Ramesh, here today. He was speaking at an International Conference on 'Environment audit - Concerns about water pollution' organised by the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India (CAG). Broadly modelled on the lines of the US Environment Protection Authority, NEPA would be a statutory body autonomous of the Environment Ministry. NEPA will subsume the work of the Central Pollution Control Board and will also handle the licensing work of providing no-objection certificates to applicants seeking environmental clearance, Mr Ramesh said. "After transferring all its licensing functions to NEPA, the Environment Ministry would remain as a policy making body," Mr Ramesh added.

PROFESSIONAL BODY

NEPA is expected to be a professional body consisting of experts from physical sciences, life sciences, engineering, law, environmental economics, public health and environmental planning and management. With NEPA and the National Green Tribunal in place, the 'Polluter Pays Principle' will be implemented, which makes both private and public sector companies pay for degrading the environment, he said. A Bill proposing the setting up of the National Green Tribunal was to be discussed in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday, before the house was adjourned till April 12. The tribunal will ensure a network of specialised environment, courts with a central bench and four other benches across the country. "It is a major step forward as for the first time it will provide civil remedy for non-implementation of environmental law," he said.

Favouring a concurrent audit, Mr Ramesh invited the CAG to carry out performance audits of major programmes of the Ministry such as its water management scheme, river conservation programme among others.

"There is a need for concurrent audit that goes along with the process of implementation of a scheme so that there is a chance to redesign projects at appropriate time and their implementation can be made very effective," he said

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