

**BEFORE THE HON'BLE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL,
PRINCIPAL BENCH, NEW DELHI
O.A. NO. 137 OF 2025**

IN THE MATTER OF:

Renu Bala & Anr.

...Applicants

Versus

Union of India & Ors.

...Respondents

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THROUGH



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Date: 28.11.2025

**BEFORE THE HON'BLE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL,
PRINCIPAL BENCH, NEW DELHI
O.A. NO. 137 OF 2025**

IN THE MATTER OF:

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WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS ON BEHALF OF RESPONDENT NOS. 7 & 8**MOST RESPECTFULLY SHOWETH:**

1. The Respondent No. 7 has been incorporated by Respondent No. 8 for the specific purpose of implementation and development of Integrated Multi-Sports Arena and commercial facilities at Sector 19-B, Dwarka, New Delhi (project site).
2. A concessional agreement dated 18.07.2022 was executed between Respondent No. 3 & 7 for implementing the said project. Notably, Respondent No. 7 is required to complete the Mandatory Facilities in the Project within 36 months from the appointed date, i.e. 02.01.2024 and in case of any failure Respondent No. 7 is liable to pay damages to Respondent No. 3 for each day of delay.

**DEEMED ENVIRONMENTAL CLEARANCE (EC) UNDER CLAUSE 8(iii), EIA
NOTIFICATION, 2006**

3. **05.10.2023** – EC application.
(Ann. R-9@Pg. Nos. 585-590 of Reply dated 19.08.2025 filed by Respondent Nos. 7 & 8)
4. **27.10.2023** – SEAC, Delhi recommended Respondent No. 7's project for issuance of TOR.
(Ann. R-10@Pg. Nos. 591-598 of Reply dated 19.08.2025 filed by Respondent Nos. 7 & 8)
5. **03.01.2024** – Respondent No. 7's project was granted TOR by SEIAA, Delhi.
(Ann. R-11@Pg. Nos. 599-606 of Reply dated 19.08.2025 filed by Respondent Nos. 7 & 8)
6. **07.03.2024** – SEAC, Delhi recommended Respondent No. 7's project for grant of EC, whereby tree felling shall be with prior permission from concerned regulatory authority.
(Ann. R-12@Pg. Nos. 607-641 of Reply dated 19.08.2025 filed by Respondent Nos. 7 & 8)
7. SEIAA, Delhi could not convene requisite meetings due to the unavailability of one of the members and admittedly no final decision on Respondent No. 7's EC

application was communicated within the mandated period of 105 days from date of SEAC's recommendation, under Clause 8(i) of EIA Notification, 2006. Therefore, Respondent No. 7's project has the benefit of deemed EC as per Clause 8(iii) of EIA Notification.

(Ann. A-1@Pg. Nos. 31-75 of the O.A. No. 137/2025)

8. **30.08.2024** – SEIAA, Delhi convened a meeting, however, Respondent No. 7's project was not taken up in the meeting.

(Ann. R-20@ Pg. Nos. 14-71 of Additional documents dated 04.09.2025 filed by Respondent Nos. 7 & 8)

9. **04.09.2024** – EC applications recommended for transfer to MoEF&CC.

(Ann. R-21@ Pg. Nos. 72-73 & Ann. R-22@ Pg. Nos. 74-76 of Additional documents dated 04.09.2025 filed by Respondent Nos. 7 & 8)

10. **10.10.2024** – EAC, MOEF&CC, Delhi recommended Respondent No. 7's project for grant of EC. One of the "Specific Conditions" of the Recommendations as per para 3.13.6.1 is no tree cutting shall be done without permission.

(Ann. A-11@Pg. Nos. 131-142 of the O.A. No. 137/2025)

NOTE - Statutory timeline given under EIA Notification (Clause 8.1 and 8.3) for Deemed EC is over, irrespective of whether 07.03.2024 is taken as the date of recommendation by SEAC or 10.10.2024 is taken as the date of recommendation by the EAC.

11. **02.01.2025** – ADS was issued after 83 days from recommendation of EAC which is beyond the statutory limit. It is important to mention that the ADS was issued to Forest Department to seek details of procedure/SOPs being followed by Govt. of Delhi for tree cutting permission in pursuance of directions of the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi, which is a parallel process under the law and no project related query was raised.

(Ann. R-23@ Pg. Nos. 77-78 of Additional documents dated 04.09.2025 filed by Respondent Nos. 7 & 8)

12. **30.01.2025** – The forest department submitted the reply to MOEF&CC.

13. **15.02.2025** – Respondent No. 7 duly replied to the letter.

(Ann. R-24@ Pg. Nos. 79 of Additional documents dated 04.09.2025 filed by Respondent Nos. 7 & 8)

14. Although MoEF&CC sought certain additional details, none of them pertains to EC and relate only to tree-felling application, which is not a pre-requisite for grant of EC. Without prejudice, there are several instances as well wherein other projects have been granted EC with a condition to seek tree-felling permission from the competent

department in case of tree felling. Respondent No. 7 is complying with all the statutory norms, while the tree felling application is under process before the competent authority, with no delay attributable to Respondent Nos. 7 & 8.

NOTE - (i) ADS cannot extend limitation indefinitely; (ii) SC order dated 19.12.2024 in Writ Petition (Civil) No. 4677/1985 titled as “M.C. Mehta v Union of India & Ors.” at Pg. Nos. 1443-1463 does not anywhere say that a party must have tree felling permission before grant of EC. The said Order is regarding implementation of Delhi Preservation of Tree Act, 1994 and grant of permissions to fell trees and is not regarding EC and its pre-requisites.

15. In O.A. No. 37/2015 & O.A. No. 213/2014 titled as ‘S.P. Muthuraman vs. Union of India & Anr.’ & ‘Manoj Mishra vs. Union of India’ vide Judgement dated 07.07.2015 the Hon’ble National Green Tribunal has opined that

Para 103 at Pg. No. 139 :It is para 8(iii) of the Notification of 2006, which provides for a kind of deeming fiction. In terms of this para, if the decision of the regulatory authority is not communicated to the Applicant within the period specified in para 8(i) & (ii), the Applicant may proceed as if the Environmental Clearance sought for has been granted or denied by the regulatory authority in terms of final recommendations of the EAC or SEAC as the case may be. For the provision of para 8(iii) to become effective the following conditions are required to be satisfied:

- (i) The application submitted by the Applicant to the SEIAA or the MOEFC as the case may be, should be complete in all respects along with requisite documents.
- (ii) All the requisite proceedings contemplated under the Notification of 2006 must be completed i.e. preparation of Terms of Reference (ToR) and submission of final EIA Report.
- (iii) There should be unambiguous recommendation by the SEAC or EAC, for granting or refusing to grant the Environmental clearance. After submission of the final EIA Report (wherever required) and upon completing the procedure prescribed under clause 8(ii), the matter should remain pending and the Applicant uninformed of the order, for the period of 105 days or 135 days, as the case may be.

Para 104 at Pg. No. 140 : “It is only thereafter that the deeming fiction contained in para 8 (iii) can operate, but even then the clear mandate of the Legislature is that the Environmental Clearance to a Project should not be deemed to have been granted to the Project Proponent. It will only be the recommendation of the EAC or SEAC that would enable the Applicant to proceed with his project in terms of the said recommendations. **The limited operation of the deeming fiction under para 8, is only the final recommendation of the EAC or the SEAC,** as the case may be, that would operate by fiction of law as the order of the regulatory authority. It is because of the default on the part of the regulatory authority to pass the final order that results in invoking the principle of ‘deeming fiction’ as contemplated under para 8(iii) of the Notification of 2006.”

16. The Hon’ble High Court of Karnataka at Bengaluru in W.P. No. 52207/2019 titled as ‘M/s Yathin Stone Crushers vs. State of Karnataka’ vide Order dated 13.09.2022 opined that:

Para 9: “From a reading of the aforesaid clause, it is very clear that in the event the regulatory authority has not communicated its decision to the applicant within the

period specified in sub paragraphs (i) or (ii) of clause 8, the applicant may proceed as if the Environmental Clearance sought for has been granted or denied by the regulatory authority in terms of the final recommendations of the Expert Appraisal Committee or State Level Appraisal Committee concerned. In the present case, respondent no. 4 which was then Appraisal Committee had recommended for grant of Environmental Clearance to the Petitioner and in spite of the same, respondent no. 5 which is the regulatory authority had not communicated any decision to the Petitioner herein within the time prescribed as provided under clause 8 (i) & (ii) of the Notification. Under the circumstances, we are of the considered view that the petitioner is entitled for a deemed environmental clearance and therefore the subsequent notice issued by respondent no. 3 is not sustainable in law”.

17. The Hon’ble High Court of Karnataka at Bengaluru in W.P. No. 10181/2024 titled as ‘M/s Siddhasiri Souharda Sahakari vs. Karnataka State Pollution Control Board & Anr.’ vide Order dated 21.08.2024 opined that:

Para 24: *“The very purpose of deemed EC after a stipulated period is to ensure timely compliance by the competent authorities. Board has been provided reasonable period of 45 days to raise any concern on the recommendation of Expert Appraisal Committee. Either to permit industry or not is to be decided as per the timelines, failing which the very purpose would be defeated.”*

SEIAA’S ADMISSION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE DEEMED EC STATUS OF RESPONDENT NO. 7

18. In RERA proceedings, SEIAA categorically admitted that the said project is entitled to deemed EC. The same is recorded in order dated 06.09.2024 and accordingly registration of Respondent No. 7 project was extended till 30.09.2024.
(Ann. R-13@ Pg. Nos. 642-645 of Reply dated 19.08.2025 filed by Respondent Nos. 7 & 8)
19. Respondent No. 7 filed a second Appeal No. 173/REAT/2024 and vide final order dated 19.03.2025 RERA Authority was directed to grant registration to Respondent No. 7’s project, subject to furnishing Pollution Clearance.
(Ann. R-14@ Pg. Nos. 646-659 of Reply dated 19.08.2025 filed by Respondent Nos. 7 & 8)
20. 07.04.2025 – Respondent No. 7’s project was granted RERA Registration Certificate.
(Ann. R-15@ Pg. Nos. 660-670 of Reply dated 19.08.2025 filed by Respondent Nos. 7 & 8)
21. 25.08.2025 – Revised RERA Registration Certificate was granted to Respondent No. 7’s project, acknowledging the fact that Respondent No. 7 holds requisite valid permissions.
(Ann. R-25@ Pg. Nos. 80-83 of Additional documents dated 04.09.2025 filed by Respondent Nos. 7 & 8)

CONSENT TO ESTABLISH (CTE) GRANTED BY RESPONDENT NO. 3

22. **06.07.2024** – Common Application for CTE was submitted.

23. **19.09.2024** – Respondent No. 7 provided a detailed explanation as to how the project was entitled to deemed EC.

(Ann. R-16@ Pg. Nos. 671-674 of Reply dated 19.08.2025 filed by Respondent Nos. 7 & 8)

24. **22.07.2025** - CTE granted to Respondent No. 7's project.

(Ann. R-17@ Pg. Nos. 675-680 of Reply dated 19.08.2025 filed by Respondent Nos. 7 & 8)

NO ILLEGAL FELLING OF TREES

25. 21.11.2024/28.02.2025 – Respondent No. 7 applied for tree felling permission. The site survey recorded 2,266 trees, of which 1,769 are proposed for felling (1,761 Kikar and 8 dry), 266 for transplantation and 231 are retained at Project site.

26. Only invasive and dried trees are proposed to be felled, while native species are retained or marked for transplantation as per law. The tree-felling application complies with the Delhi Preservation of Trees Act, 1994 and SOP dated 24.04.2025, has been reviewed by the Principal Secretary, Forest Department, and forwarded to the CEC.

27. Several trees/some of the branches of Kikar trees fell and sustained damaged due to heavy rain and strong winds/storm at multiple instances during 2021-2025 (The PP was handed over the project on 18.07.2022) as is evident from Inspection conducted on 01.09.2025 by Respondent No. 4. It is also stated in the said Report that the trees fallen/damaged at Project site were found to be in order as per tree list and all fallen/damaged trees were numbered with unique number and marked with colour coding and all the trees are lying at the Project site and still part of tree-felling application of Respondent No. 7.

(Ann. B@ Pg. Nos. 835-837 of Reply dated 16.09.2025 filed by Respondent No. 4)

28. Respondent No. 7 vide letter dated 12.08.2025 requested the Deputy Conservator of Forest to issue NOC for compensatory plantation at the allocated sites.

(Ann. R-18@ Pg. Nos. 681-683 of Reply dated 19.08.2025 filed by Respondent Nos. 7 & 8)

29. Permission was granted to Respondent No. 7 to undertake compensatory plantation vide Letter dated 20.08.2025. Further, Land was allotted for compensatory plantation by the DDA.

(Ann. R-26@ Pg. Nos. 84 of Additional documents dated 04.09.2025 filed by Respondent Nos. 7 & 8)

(Para 5 & 8 at pages 792-793 of Reply by Respondent No. 4)

30. 26.08.2025 – Respondent No. 7 requested Respondent No. 4 to expedite tree felling application.
(Ann. R-27@ Pg. Nos. 85-87 of Additional documents dated 04.09.2025 filed by Respondent Nos. 7 & 8)
31. Application of tree felling permission is pending before the appropriate authority and no tree shall be felled without appropriate permission from CEC, as mandated by the Hon'ble Supreme Court.

THROUGH



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New Delhi
Date: 28.11.2025

**BEFORE THE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL
PRINCIPAL BENCH
NEW DELHI**

**ORIGINAL APPLICATION NO. 37 OF 2015
(M.A. NO. 291, 293 & 294 OF 2015)**

AND

**ORIGINAL APPLICATION NO. 213 OF 2014
(MA 755 of 2014 & M.A. No. 177 of 2015)**

IN THE MATTER OF:

S.P. Muthuraman
S/o. Ponnusamy,
No. 204, Railway Feeder Road,
Sankar Nagar Post – 627 357
Tirunelveli Distict.

.....Applicant

Versus

1. Union of India
Rep. by the Secretary to Government,
Ministry of Environment and Forests,
Government of India, Paryavaran Bhavan,
New Delhi - 110003
2. The State of Tamil Nadu
Rep. by the Secretary to Government,
Ministry of Environment and Forests,
Government of Tamil Nadu,
Fort St. George,
Chennai – 600 003

.....Respondents

AND

IN THE MATTER OF:

Manoj Mishra
Convener, Yamuna Jiye Abhiyaan,
178-F, Pocket-4,
Mayur Vihar, Phase-I,
Delhi-110 091.

.....Applicant

Versus

Union of India
Through the Secretary,
Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change,
Indira Paryavaran Bhawan,
Jor Bagh Road,
New Delhi- 110 003.

.....Respondent

ORIGINAL APPLICATION NO. 37 OF 2015

Counsel for Applicant:

Mr. T. Mohan and Mr. A. Yogeshwaran, Advocate.

Counsel for Respondents:

Mr. Vivek Chib, Mr. Asif Ahmed, Ms. Ruchira Goel, Mr. Kushal Gupta, Mr. Joby Varghese and Mr. Ankit Prakash, Advocates for Respondent No. 1

Mr. M. Yogesh Kanna and Ms. J. Janani, Advocates for Respondent No. 2.

Mr. Ashwani Kumar, Sr. Advocate, with M/s. R. Mohan and Mr. V. Balaji

Mr. K.S. Mahadevan and Mr. Krishna Kumar, Advocate

Mr. R. Chandrachud, Advocate

Mr. Ashwani Kumar, Sr. Advocate with M/s. R. Mohan Parasawarn, Mr. Varun Sharma and Mr. Srikantha Srinivas

Mr. Amit S. Chadha, Sr. Advocate, Mr. R. Chandrachud, Advocate

Mr. Shyamal Anand, Mr. R. Jawahar Lal and Mr. Sarvanna Kumar, Advocates for Respondent No. 3 & 5.

Original Application No. 213 of 2015

Counsel for Applicant:

Mr. Rahul Choudhary and Ms. Neha Kurian, Advocates.

Counsel for Respondents:

Mr. Vivek Chib, Mr. Asif Ahmed, Ms. Ruchira Goel, Mr. Kushal Gupta, Mr. Joby Varghese and Mr. Ankit Prakash, Advocates for Respondent No. 1

JUDGMENT

PRESENT:

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Swatanter Kumar (Chairperson)

Hon'ble Mr. Justice U.D. Salvi (Judicial Member)

Hon'ble Dr. D.K. Agrawal (Expert Member)

Hon'ble Prof. A.R. Yousuf (Expert Member)

Hon'ble Mr. Bikram Singh Sajwan (Expert Member)

Reserved on: 29th April, 2015

Pronounced on: 7th July, 2015

1. Whether the judgment is allowed to be published on the net?
2. Whether the judgment is allowed to be published in the NGT Reporter?

JUSTICE SWATANTER KUMAR, (CHAIRPERSON)

By this common judgment, we shall dispose of the Original Applications No. 213 of 2014 and 135 of 2014 (upon transfer from SZ Bench, numbered as Original Application No. 37 of 2015) as well as Miscellaneous Applications No. 291, 293, 294 of 2015 in Original Application No. 37 of 2015, Miscellaneous Applications No. 755 of 2014 & M.A. No. 177 of 2015 in Original Applications No. 213 of 2014 and the claims of all the seven interveners/Respondents, as common question of law on somewhat similar facts arise for determination of the Tribunal in all these cases. We may briefly notice the facts of each Original Application giving rise to their filing.

2. In Original Application No. 213 of 2014, the Applicant claims that he is a former member of the Indian Forest Service and is the convener of the “*Yamuna Jiye Abhiyaan*”. The Organization is working for promotion of nature conservation as a strategy for establishment of a peaceful world.

3. According to the Applicant, the State is under a constitutional duty in terms of Article 51A of the Constitution of India, to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife. Respondent No. 1 has issued a Notification dated 14th September, 2006 titled the Environment Clearance Regulations of 2006 (for short ‘Notification of 2006’), under the

powers conferred upon it by sub-Section (1) and clause (v) of sub-Section (2) of Section 3 of the Environmental Protection Act, 1986 (for short 'Act of 1986'). As per the provisions of the Notification of 2006, the project or activities falling under Category 'A' of the Schedule require prior permission from the Central Government while project and activities falling under Category 'B' require prior permission from the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (for short 'SEIAA'). These permissions are to be obtained before any construction work or preparation of the land by the project management except for securing the land is started on project or activity. Respondent No.1 issued the Office Memorandum dated 16th November, 2010 for consideration of proposals involving violation of the Act of 1986 and the Notification of 2006. On 12th December, 2012, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (for short 'MoEF') issued another Office Memorandum, superseding the Office Memorandum of 16th November, 2010. In terms of this Office Memorandum, it was stated that as soon as any case of violation with respect to the Notification of 2006 is brought to the notice of the MoEF, it will proceed to verify the veracity of the complaint through the regional offices and upon such verification the explanation of Project Proponent will be asked for. If the Ministry is satisfied that it is a case of violation, then before proceeding any further, the authorities would require the Project Proponent to submit its environment related policy, plan of action and a written commitment to ensure that violation will not be repeated within 60 days in terms of the Office Memorandum dated

12th December, 2012 and would delist the project in the meanwhile. Other detailed consequences were also provided in the Office Memorandum dated 12th December, 2012. The Office Memorandum dated 12th December, 2012 was further amended by the Office Memorandum dated 27th June, 2013, which *inter alia*, also provided as under:

"It is felt that in addition to these guidelines circulated vide aforesaid Office Memorandum dated 12.12.2012, in case of violation cases, the Project Proponent needs to be restrained, through appropriate directions under Section 5 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 from carrying out any construction or operation activity without the required clearance or beyond the level/capacity stated in the existing clearance, as the case may be, till it procures the requisite EC/CRZ Clearance for the same."

4. According to the Applicant all the three Office Memoranda dated 16th November, 2010, 12th December, 2012 and 27th June, 2013 have been placed on record for the first time by the MoEF along with its reply filed in Appeal No. 98 of 2013. Thus, the Applicant has acquired the knowledge of these circulars only during the hearing of the said Appeal. The Applicant challenges the legality and correctness of these circulars on various grounds, including, that these Office Memoranda are contrary to and in contradiction with the provisions of the Notification of 2006; the Notification of 2006 having been issued under the provisions of Section 3 of Act of 1986, cannot be diluted, rendered ineffective or infructuous by issuance of these Office Memoranda. The Notification of 2006 requires that not only the new projects falling under category 'A' and 'B' listed in the Schedule to the Notification of 2006, but even the expansion and modernisation of such existing projects or

activities would require prior Environmental Clearance from the competent authority. The Notification of 2006 further contemplates that prior Environmental Clearance would be necessary even when there is any change in the product mix in an existing manufacturing unit beyond the specified range. It is the case of the Applicant that Para 7 of the Notification of 2006 requires mandatory compliance to the process prescribed for grant of Environmental Clearance. There are four stages i.e. Screening, Scoping, Public Consultation and Appraisal prescribed under Para 7 of the Notification of 2006. This process has to be followed in terms of the Notification of 2006 before a prior Environmental Clearance can be granted to the listed projects. The Applicant alleges that impugned Office Memoranda provide for considering the project of any Applicant where construction has been done already and does not specify the compliance of these four stages prescribed under Para 7 of the Notification of 2006. Therefore, the very purpose of the provisions of Act of 1986 and the Notification of 2006 stands frustrated by these Office Memoranda. If the construction has already commenced and/or even completed, compliance to the provisions of these laws would be impossible. It is the case of the Applicant that the Notification of 2006 has been issued in furtherance to exercise of subordinate delegated legislation for satisfying and complying with the provisions of Section 3 of the Act of 1986 which mandates that Central Government shall have the power to take all such measures as it deems necessary or expedient for the purpose of protecting and improving the quality of the

environment and preventing, controlling and abating environmental pollution. The law requires the Project Proponent to take prior Environmental Clearance while these Office Memoranda state exactly to the contrary, thus, encouraging people to flout the law in force on the one hand and cause environmental damage and degradation on the other.

5. In Original Application No. 37 of 2015 (Application 135 of 2014, SZ Bench), the Applicant has impugned the Office Memoranda dated 12th December, 2012 and 27th June, 2013. While raising the challenge on similar grounds as of the Applicant in Original Application No. 213 of 2014, he has further stated that the impugned Office Memoranda are against India's international obligation such as Stockholm Conference, 1972 and Rio De Janeiro Declaration 1992 and has also violated the mandate of Article 51 of the Constitution. It is submitted that environmental management or planning is the study of unintended consequences of a project. Its purpose is to identify, examine, assess and evaluate the likely and probable impacts of a proposed project on the environment and, thereby, to work out remedial action plans to minimize these adverse impacts on the environment. All this is required to be done at a stage before the commencement of the project. The law does not visualise such examination post-commencement and upon completion of the project, in relation to the covered projects and activities. According to the Applicant, the aim and purpose of Environmental Impact Assessment (for short 'EIA') is to inform the process of decision-making by identifying the potentially significant

environmental effects and risks of development proposals and to promote sustainable development by ensuring that development proposals do not undermine critical resource and ecological functions or the well being, lifestyle and livelihood of the communities and people who depend on them. The importance of conducting an exhaustive EIA before any project is granted Environmental Clearance has been acknowledged internationally. The United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) Charter states that EIA should be ensured to minimize adverse effects on nature and nature assessments should be included in the fundamental elements of all planning and should be publicly disclosed and deliberated. The EIA Directive (85/337/EEC) of the European Union which is in force since 1985, requires a defined EIA to be implemented by member nations prior to official authorization for projects with potential significant environmental impacts. The very purpose of conducting an EIA before a project is granted clearance is to ensure that no development takes place without sufficient assessment of the risks and damages that would be caused to the environment due to the project's construction and development. The authorization should follow such study and imposition of conditions rather than the converse. The application for seeking Environmental Clearance has to be made in Form 1 or the Supplementary Form 1A, as the case may be. The requisites required under Form 1 have to be supplied prior to the date of commencement of the project except to the extent of arranging land. The State Level Expert Appraisal Committee (for short 'SEAC') has

to assess the project as on that date and stage, then alone it has to recommend whether such project should or should not be granted such Environmental Clearance. According to the Applicant, the impugned Office Memoranda have stated that the projects which have attained substantial physical progress relating to the construction at the site shall be considered by the Expert Committee for the grant of prospective Environmental Clearance, though no Environmental Clearance was obtained prior to commencement of development, as mandated by law. Thus, the impugned Office Memoranda are contrary to law.

The impugned Office Memoranda in question provide that violations could come to the notice of the Ministry at various stages of processing of the proposals and provide for grant of Environmental Clearance even to those projects. Under these Office Memoranda, if a Project Proponent commits breach of the conditions or has already commenced or completed the construction without obtaining required Environmental Clearance for the project, then the concerned State Government is required to initiate credible action on these violations by invoking powers under Section 15 and 19 of the Act of 1986. This is an entirely unworkable system and is even contrary to the federal structure of the Constitution. If this approach and procedure is allowed to be followed then any builder/Project Proponent would complete his project causing irreversible damage to the environment and will then seek post-facto Environmental Clearance from the authorities making it a *fait accompli* situation. In that event, even the most

illegal and irregular projects, which are completely violating the Environmental norms, may have to be legalised and legitimized, which would be contrary to law, would even defeat the potential penal consequences prescribed under the Act of 1986 and thus, would be unable to prevent damage to environment and ecology.

Both the Applicants have relied upon the judgment of the Supreme Court in the cases of *Lafarge Umiam Mining Pvt. Ltd. v. Union of India (UOI) and Ors.*, (2011) 7 SCC 338 and *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India (UOI) and Ors.*, (2004) 12 SCC 118, to contend that the circulars issued by the MoEF cannot nullify a statutory Notification. In the case of *M.C. Mehta* (supra), the MoEF had issued a circular dated 14th May, 2002, thereby providing an opportunity to people to seek clearance in relation to projects which were already operational but in violation of the Notification of 2006. The Supreme Court observed that it showed total non-sensitivity of the MoEF towards the principle of Sustainable Development and the object behind the issuance of the Notification of 2006. The Supreme Court in the case of *M. C. Mehta v. Union of India*, (1987) 4 SCC 463, held that life, public health and ecology have priority over unemployment and loss of revenue. Clearly, the grant of ex post facto Environmental Clearance has not met the approval of Supreme Court legally. According to the Applicants, the circulars are violative of the spirit behind Articles 48A and 51A(g) of the Constitution of India. Under Article 21 of the Constitution, right to a decent and clean environment is a Fundamental Right and thus,

its protection by all, including the State, is a Constitutional obligation.

Before we revert to the case advanced on behalf of the respective Respondents, it is essential for us to notice that a number of applications were filed for impleadment by various Project Proponents who had taken advantage of these impugned Office Memoranda or were in the process of seeking advantage thereof. MA Nos. 232, 281, 282, 166, 97 and 110, all of 2015, were filed for impleadment by different builders. These applications came to be allowed vide order dated 12th February, 2015 and 1st April, 2015 respectively. Vide these orders, the following Respondents were directed to be impleaded as contesting Respondents:

Mr. Y. Pondurai (Respondent No. 3)

M/s Ruby Manoharan Property Developers Pvt. Ltd.
(Respondent No. 4)

M/s Jones Foundations Pvt. Ltd. (Respondent No. 5)

M/s SSM Builders and Promoters (Respondent No. 6)

M/s SPR and RG Construction Pvt. Ltd. (Respondent No. 7)

M/s Dugar Housing Ltd. (Respondent No. 8)

6. M/s SAS Realtors Pvt. Ltd. has also filed an application M.A. No. 291 of 2015 for impleadment and directions. The said application was heard when the Original Applications were being heard on merits. The Applicant was permitted to address the Tribunal on the merit and otherwise of his impleadment application, as well as on the Original Applications. Since we had permitted the Applicant to participate in the proceeding and

address argument, this application stood allowed and consequently, M.A. No. 291 of 2015 for impleadment of M/s SAS Realtors Pvt. Ltd. as Respondent No. 9 is also allowed.

7. MAs 293 and 294 of 2015 were filed by M/s Dugar Housing Ltd. and M/s SPR and RG Construction Ltd. respectively, for producing additional documents on record which were permitted and the documents are on the file of the Tribunal. Consequently, both these Applications No. 293 and 294 of 2015 stand allowed.

Still another set of application was filed, being M.A. No. 167, 168, 169 and 172 of 2015 by different builders for impleadment and directions. During the course of hearing, none appeared on their behalf to argue and pursue these applications and resultantly vide order dated 1st April, 2015, these applications were dismissed. However, the Applicants were granted liberty to raise their grievances before the Tribunal or if they had their independent cause of action, by taking recourse to independent remedy in accordance with law.

8. M.A. 755 of 2014 has been filed in Original Application No. 213 of 2014 praying for stay of operation of these Office Memoranda. Since we are dealing with the Original Applications finally by this Judgment, M.A. No. 755 of 2014 does not survive for consideration and is accordingly disposed of. M.A. 177 of 2015 had been filed on behalf of the MoEF for waiver of cost of Rs. 20,000 which was imposed vide order of the Registrar dated 16th February, 2015, for not filing a counter affidavit. Since the arguments have already been concluded and all parties have addressed their

submissions, we do not consider it necessary to direct the payment of the cost imposed by the above order in the interest of justice. Resultantly, this application is allowed. The cost of Rs. 20,000 by order dated 16th February, 2015 is waived. The application is disposed of.

9. The Project Proponents upon their applications were directed to be impleaded as Respondents in the main application. The Applicants as well as these newly added Respondents submitted affidavits, documents and other details in regard to the projects in question. The Applicant in the main application in relation to **M/s Y. Pondurai (Respondent No. 3)**, submitted that it is a construction project extending to 28,262.81 sq. mtrs. to which the planning permission was issued on 31st December, 2013. The construction was started even prior thereto on receipt of the recommendation from the Government. The application to SEIAA was filed on 21st February, 2014. On 28th February, 2014, SEIAA informed the Project Proponent that no activity should be carried on prior to grant of Environmental Clearance. SEIAA on 11th March, 2014 asked for photographs of the site to consider the application. On 21st March, 2014, the photographs of the project and an apology along with undertaking were submitted by the Project Proponent to the SEIAA. SEIAA on 1st April, 2014 wrote to Additional Secretary for initiation of prosecution against the said Respondent. The Applicant heavily relies upon this letter of 1st April, 2014 placed on record vide which, the Member Secretary of the SEIAA, Tamil Nadu had written to the Additional Chief Secretary to the Government,

stating that there were repeated breaches on the part of the Project Proponent and that action needs to be taken. The relevant part of the said letter reads as under:

“I inform that as per the EIA Notification 2006, all new projects or activities or expansion and modernization of those existing projects or activities listed in the schedule to the said Notification with capacity beyond the threshold limits prescribed there under, to obtain prior Environmental Clearance under the provision thereof.

The Proponent vide letter dated 21.03.14 has forwarded the expressing regret over the commencing of construction without obtaining EC and also expressed assurance to not to repeat such violations in future. The Authority after careful consideration decided to address the Additional Chief Secretary, E&F Department, Government of Tamil Nadu to take action against the violation of EIA Notification, 2006 under provision of Environment (Protection) Act 1986.

In the light of the above and as per the clause 5(ii) of O.M. of MoEF, GOI, New Delhi dt: 12.12.2012 (copy is enclosed), it is requested to initiate action against Thiry Y. Pondurai, No. 129, Usman Road, T.Nagar, Chennai – 600 017., by invoking powers under Section 19 of the Environment (Protection) Act 1986 for having started the construction work without obtaining requisite Prior Environmental Clearance. It is requested that the action taken in this regard may be informed to the Ministry of Environment & Forests, Government of India and to this office along with supporting documents to enable us to take further action in the matter.”

10. On 22nd April, 2014, the Principal Secretary, FAC wrote to the Principal Secretary, SEIAA, bringing to his notice the Notification issued by the Ministry dated 28th February, 2014 which delegated powers vested under Section 5 of the Act of 1986, to all the State and Union Territory Environment Impact Assessment Authorities, under whose jurisdiction the project was located, to issue show cause notice for the violations committed. On 28th May, 2014, SEIAA wrote to the Principal Secretary that in case of violation of

EIA Notification, 2006, prior to issuance of Environmental Clearance, a show cause notice should be issued and action has to be taken by the State Government. On 5th June, 2014, the Principal Secretary wrote to the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (for short 'TNPCB') requesting them to take legal action in accordance with the Notification of 2006. This resulted in the issuance of show cause notice to Respondent No. 3 on 12th July, 2014 by the TNPCB, reply to which was submitted by the Project Proponent on 23rd July, 2014.

11. On 26th November, 2014, SEIAA informed the Project Proponent that there was substantial progress in the construction of its project which was noticed even during the scrutiny of the application of Respondent No. 3. An affidavit was filed before the Tribunal by the TNPCB in April, 2015 on the basis of inspection conducted by a team on 2nd April, 2015, stating that the civil construction work in all blocks had been completed, however, outer and interior works were being carried on. On 4th April, 2015, the Project Proponent responded to the TNPCB that the structural work was completed long back and the same was started as soon as the principal approval from the Government Housing and Urban Development Department and the planning permit from the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority (for short 'CMDA') were obtained. According to the Applicant, while referring to the report submitted by SEIAA and other documents on record, it is clear that the total project cost is Rs. 148.25 Crores. It is a project for development of commercial complex consisting of Main Block - 2

basements + ground floor + 10; Service Block – basement + ground floor + 2 floors and MLCP Block – 2 basements + ground floor + 4 floors. According to SEIAA, construction work for the project was under progress at the time of submission of the apology letter and the undertaking. In inspection of 14th April, 2015, it was noticed that civil work of all the blocks were completed.

12. Vide letter dated 26th November, 2014, the Project Proponent had been informed not to carry on any construction activity. Photographs on record taken on 21st March, 2014 had shown digging or excavation of earth and some construction activity at that level. None of the blocks had been completed at that time. While the photographs taken on 14th April, 2015 show that some of the blocks have been completed and even finished internally and exteriorly. The Applicant has also pointed out that in the application for impleadment, it is averred by the Project Proponent that he had made application to SEIAA on 21st February, 2014 for Environmental Clearance, after obtaining planning permission. In the meeting dated 11th March, 2014, SEIAA had asked him to furnish additional documents to which he replied on 21st March, 2014, but in the meanwhile the Project Proponent had commenced construction activity investing huge sums of money. However, in his letter dated 4th April, 2015, a different stand was taken and it was stated that the project was completed long back and was carried out as soon as approval was granted by the Government and after granting of permission and the planning permit being issued by the CMDA. From this, it is clear that the Project Proponent had raised

construction much prior to the submission of the application for the Environmental Clearance on 21st February, 2014. In the application, he falsely declared that he was planning to start the construction activity. He continued with the construction, even after filing the letter of apology and undertaking and despite show cause notice dated 12th July, 2014 continued it till 2nd April, 2015 when the premises were inspected by the SEIAA and TNPCB. In the submission of the Applicant, the entire project of Respondent No. 3 has therefore, been constructed illegally, in an unauthorized manner and by making misrepresentations to the concerned authorities.

Stand of Respondent No. 3 (Mr. Y. Pondurai):

13. The stand of this Respondent is that after obtaining the planning permission, it had applied to SEIAA on 21st February, 2014 seeking the Environmental Clearance for the Project. The Project Proponent was required to file additional documents which he had filed on 21st March, 2014. Construction had been started by the Project Proponent on receipt of the recommendation from the Government and after the Planning Permission had been issued. We may notice here that the Applicant however, submitted while referring to the letter of the Project Proponent dated 4th April, 2015 that even this submission of the Project Proponent is factually incorrect. In the said letter, it has been stated that the project work was structurally completed long back and the same was carried forward as soon as principal letter of approval from the Government, Housing and Urban Development Department was

issued in the year 2013. The construction activity thus, had started even before filing the application before SEIAA for grant of Environmental Clearance.

According to the Project Proponent, the construction was carried out under a *bona fide* belief. The Project Proponent also claimed that it had obtained permission from the Airport Authority on 2nd November, 2012. The condition No. 2 of the letter dated 31st May, 2013 is relied by the Project Proponent to say that Environmental Clearance was to be furnished before issue of the Completion Certificate. Thus, there is no fault of the Project Proponent in raising the construction without Environmental Clearance. According to this Respondent, the main application is not maintainable either on law or on facts. Plea of limitation was also taken by this Respondent but without referring as to how the application is barred by time.

14. In relation to **M/s SPR and RG Construction Pvt. Ltd. (Respondent No. 7)**, the Applicant has averred that planning permit from the CMDA was granted on 20th July, 2012 in which combined basement 1 & 2 + ground floor + 14 floors of block 1 to 9 residential building with 950 dwelling units was permitted. Permissions from various other authorities during the period from 25th February, 2011 to 28th April, 2011 have also been filed on record, but there is variance in the Survey Nos. given in Annexure R8 and R9 and R10, R11, R12, R13. The Project Proponent claims to have filed application to SEIAA on 28th January, 2011, which fact is not admitted by SEIAA. The Project Proponent then moved fresh

application on 12th June, 2013 dated 10th June, 2013 to SEIAA for grant of Environmental Clearance. The Project Proponent had been seeking extra time from SEIAA and in regard to this, reference is made to the letters dated 20th February, 2013, 25th April, 2013 and 21st March, 2013 from SEIAA, reference of which have also been placed on record and it does not refer to the application of the Project Proponent dated 28th January, 2011. SEIAA on 12th June, 2013 acknowledged this application and passed an order that no activity should be undertaken unless Environmental Clearance was granted. On 1st July, 2013, the Project Proponent submitted photographs with the letter of apology, pursuant to the Board meeting of Project Proponent held on 17th June, 2013, assuring non-repetition of violation. Photographs which have been placed on record show that the construction was at the very initial stages i.e. excavation work had been done and pillars were being raised. Further details were asked for by the SEIAA vide its letter dated 22nd August, 2013 clearly mentioning that if the additional particulars were not submitted by 10th September, 2013, the project would be closed without notice. The Project Proponent did not provide the requisite information within the stipulated time. On 13th September, 2013, the Project Proponent submitted some documents with the promise to provide rest of them at a subsequent date. The SEAC on 30th September, 2013 prescribed the TOR which was issued by SEIAA on 7th October, 2013. The TNPCB conducted an inspection on 10th December, 2013 and noticed that the construction activity was being carried on. Later, a compliance

report of the TOR was submitted which mentions about the collection of primary data from August, 2013 to October, 2013 which is prior to even issuance of the data of the TOR. Thereafter, an EIA report was submitted on 28th April, 2014. On 22nd January, 2015, the Project Proponent wrote to the TNPCB, referring to the inspection and denying continuation of construction in violation of the undertaking provided, though a case being C.C. No. 56 of 2014 had been filed against this Respondent which was pending before the Judicial Magistrate, Ambattur. SEIAA on 19th May, 2014 wrote to the Project Proponent to furnish additional details. According to the Applicants, the construction was going on even at that stage. Thereafter, SEAC decided to recommend proposal to SEIAA to issue Environmental Clearance but only after obtaining and considering the information stated in the recommendations. It included even that the landscape area and green area was not to be less than 15 per cent of the total area. On 20th June, 2014, SEIAA asked for further documents from the Project Proponent. The Project Proponent had written a letter to SEIAA vide its letter dated 23rd July, 2014. This letter according to the Applicant is a departure from the CMDA's planning permit since the Project Proponent was sanctioned 9 blocks, while this letter talks of 10 blocks. SEIAA again on 10th November, 2014 required the Project Proponent not to carry out any construction of the project. The 26th November, 2014 letter of the CMDA refers to a new PPA made by the Project Proponent and states that the planning permission application would be returned in the absence of a revised plan incorporating

EIA Clearance for the revised proposal. On 30th January, 2015, the Project Proponent resubmitted revised PPA without EIA and asked for further three weeks time to submit the latest developments for Clearance. The Project Proponent appointed new Consultant on 11th February, 2015 and vide its letter dated 19th February, 2015, CMDA asked for a structural stability certificate.

Pursuant to Tribunal's orders, an inspection was carried out by the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board on 2nd April, 2015, based on which an affidavit was filed before the Tribunal, stating that the construction is almost complete in all the blocks and that outer and inner works were going on and construction was going on even on 2nd April, 2015. On 4th April, 2015, the Project Proponent submitted a reply to the show cause notice served by District Environmental Engineer, Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board, Ambattur, where it was stated that construction had been stopped. From the current photographs placed on record, it is clear that the construction work is at its completion stage in complete contrast to the photographs submitted at the time of the filing of the documents by the Project Proponent. Stop work notice was also issued by the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board on 2nd April, 2015 to which the Project Proponent responded on 3rd April, 2015 by stating that they have stopped the construction activity upon the receipt of the stop work notice. According to the Applicant, this Project Proponent had all through violated its letter of apology and undertaking given to SEIAA. It carried on construction illegally and in an unauthorized manner. It even revised its plan and raised

further construction in relation to additional block for which there was no construction permission and other permissions from the authorities. Even till date, the Environmental Clearance has not been granted to this project and the project has caused serious and adverse environmental and ecological impacts.

Stand of Respondent No. 7 (M/s SPR and RG Construction Pvt. Ltd.)

15. Respondent No. 7, M/s SPR and RG Construction Pvt. Ltd. has taken a stand that they are engaged in construction of residential complexes. They intend to construct residential apartments at different Survey Nos. 137/1, 138/1, 148/5A and 148/7A Karambakkam Village, Ambattur Taluk, Thiruvallur District, TN, under the name and style of "Osian Chlorophyll". This Respondent submitted its application to SEIAA on 28th January, 2011 for grant of Environmental Clearance for the project. This project was to have the construction of floors as already indicated with a total project area of 35786.05 sq meters with a built up area of 166479.79 sq meters at a total cost of project of Rs. 251.01 crores as proposed. SEIAA had asked for additional particulars and the Project Proponent was advised to give a presentation before the SEAC which was done by the Project Proponent on 30th September, 2013. The said Expert Appraisal Committee recommended the project for grant of Environmental Clearance subject to furnishing of certain details/approvals. The Respondent claims to have complied with those requirements. According to the Project Proponent, the term of the presiding officer of SEIAA had expired around 2nd March, 2011 and remained so till 4th March, 2012 and

no action was taken on the application submitted by the Project Proponent. While simultaneously pursuing the application with SEIAA, the Project Proponent also took NOCs from different authorities like Airport Authority of India, Chennai, Traffic Police, Chennai Water Supply and Sewage Board and planning permit from CMDA on 28th January, 2013. Because of the non-availability of the Members of SEIAA, the Project Proponents like other builders, started construction after seeking the planning permit. The planning permission was granted subject to the condition that the Project Proponents would obtain Environmental Clearance prior to seeking completion certificate for construction. The Applicant started construction under a *bona fide* belief. It is not disputed by this Respondent that the construction raised by it was objected to by the authorities, but taking into account the circumstances and in view of the circulars, Respondent continued with its construction. An undertaking cum apology was also furnished under the format given by the SEIAA on 26th September, 2013. Appraisal Committee on 17th June, 2014 recommended the project with some observation which the Project Proponents was willing to comply. The said Respondent upon enquiry and vide letter dated 10th November, 2014 came to know that since operation of the had been stayed by the National Green Tribunal, SEIAA had de-listed their application subject to the orders of the Tribunal.

16. It is the specific plea of the Respondent that he had applied for Environmental Clearance which had neither been accepted nor rejected within 45 days despite recommendation by the Expert

Appraisal Committee, thus, there would be deemed sanction in favour of the Project Proponent under the Notification of 2006.

17. The authorities i.e. SEIAA, Tamil Nadu and Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board have taken up the stand that the construction without prior Environmental Clearance was not permissible. The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board vide their letter dated 14th February, 2014 had informed the SEIAA that cases had been registered against violators i.e. Project Proponents. The inspection was conducted and stop work notice was issued on 2nd April, 2015 55 complaints have been filed against the violators including the Respondent - Project Proponents. However, in some cases, the proceedings have been stayed by the High Court of Madras. The unauthorized construction by the Project Proponent was brought to notice as back on 15th July, 2013 and despite orders, the construction was continued which was stopped only upon inspection as on 4th April, 2015. Even on 24th December, 2013, the Project Proponent was served with a notice that no construction should be carried out without grant of Environmental Clearance. The construction work in all the 10 blocks had been completed however some interior work was still to be carried out. The Board of Directors of the Project Proponent had furnished a resolution on 12th July, 2013 along with the letter of apology and assurance that no construction would be carried out. However, this was not adhered to. According to SEIAA, tenure of the State Level Environmental Assessment Authority was notified on 4th April, 2012

and after the completion of 3 years of tenure, the same has ended on 3rd April, 2015. Its reconstitution is awaited.

18. In relation to **M/s Dugar Housing Ltd. (Respondent No. 8)**, according to the Applicant on 28th January, 2013, building permit for the construction of combined basement floor + combined stilt floor + first floor to third floor + two towers with fourth floor to 10th floor residential cum commercial building with 285 dwelling units, community hall, gymnasiums, swimming pool and office space at survey no. 779/2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, 2E & 2F of Korattur Village, Ambattur, Chennai was issued in favour of the said Respondent. This permission states that the Project Proponent had also furnished an undertaking to abide by the terms and conditions put by various authorities specified therein and the Project Proponent was to submit necessary applications to the authorities. However, in para 7, it has been stated specifically that this approval is not final and that the Project Proponent has to approach Commissioner of Corporation, Chennai for issuance of Building Permit under the Local Body Act. On 8th May, 2013, a building license from Corporation of Chennai was applied for and was granted on the same date. However, the averment of the Project Proponent that he had applied for building license on 28th January, 2013 is factually not correct. Thereafter, application for Environmental Clearance was moved to SEIAA for construction of 56,153.22 sq mtr in a total plot area of 11,789 sq mtrs. It is also pointed out by the Applicant that there is serious variance in the documents placed on record. In the letter dated 17th June, 2011 addressed by Fire and Rescue

Services Department to the Project Proponent, it has been stated that plot area in the proposal is 12,006.92 sq mtr and the proposed built up area is 41,327.80 sq mtrs. Vide this letter, the Department had given 'No Objection' to accord planning permit to the proposal, but subject to the satisfaction of the conditions specified in the report. The compliance report was to be submitted before actual Occupancy Certificate is issued and the Department was to conduct re-inspection. In response to the letter and application for Environmental Clearance dated 4th June, 2013 by the Project Proponent, SEIAA had responded vide letter dated 7th June, 2013, acknowledging the receipt of the application and clearly informing the Project Proponent that as per the Notification of 2006 along with amendments therein notified by the MoEF, no activity should be taken in any part of India unless prior Environmental Clearance is granted in accordance with the objective of the National Environmental Policy. This letter specifically requires the Project Proponent not to commence any construction activity other than clearing the site, fencing the site and putting up the temporary structure for accommodation of labour etc. On 21st June, 2013, SEIAA asked the Project Proponent to furnish additional documents including approved building site plan, photographs of the building site and a commitment letter that no activity shall be carried out before obtaining the Environmental Clearance from the competent authority.

19. According to the Applicant, no additional documents or particulars were furnished by the Project Proponent till 20th July,

2013, the last date given by the SEIAA to close their application in event of default in furnishing documents or particulars, without further notice. However, some documents were submitted by the Project Proponent on 30th July, 2013. Various letters including letter dated 21st June, 2013, 8th August, 2013 and 10th September, 2013 were written by the SEIAA to Project Proponent seeking further information. Finally, vide its letter dated 24th September, 2013, SEIAA informed the Project Proponent that SEAC meeting would be held on 30th September, 2013. In the meeting held on that day, SEAC recommended the project for grant of Environmental Clearance, subject to conditions. According to the Applicant, the documents requisitioned were not placed before SEAC as the extract of minutes of meeting of SEAC makes no reference to construction in violation of Notification of 2006 and belies the submission of alleged letter dated 26th September, 2013, which claims to have enclosed Board resolution dated 12th August, 2013. The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board conducted inspection of the site on 20th May, 2014 and found that the ground level work had already started which resulted in issuance of a show cause notice dated 21st May, 2014. This inspection report contradicts the resolution dated 12th August, 2013 that has been placed by the Project Proponent on record and therefore, there were clear violations of the Notification of 2006. In the show cause notice, it had been specifically noticed that the construction of the work had been carried out without obtaining Environmental Clearance. The reply to this show cause notice was submitted by Project Proponent

vide their letter dated 16th June, 2014, wherein it was nowhere denied that the construction work was carried on without obtaining Environmental Clearance; in fact, the stand taken was that other clearances except Environmental Clearance have been issued in favour of the Project Proponent. According to the Project Proponent, the project construction was started because there was huge investment involving client's money and the construction has to be taken up on time to deliver the property as committed or else it could lead to huge losses to the developer and unwarranted hassles to the end user. It was averred that after the inspection of the site, the work has been suspended.

20. Upon inspection by the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board, it was noticed that the unit had completed construction work of 5 blocks and interior work is under process. It is not clear that when permission was granted for building 2 blocks, how come 5 blocks were constructed. This inspection was conducted on 2nd April, 2015 and stop work notice was issued by the Board on the same day. An inspection had also been conducted on 14th April, 2015. The photographs submitted to SEIAA on 26th September, 2013 and the photographs taken on 14th April, 2015 clearly show that there are environmental violations by the Project Proponent. The entire construction has been raised without grant of Environmental Clearance and even without compliance with other laws, thus, at this stage affecting the environment and ecology of that area. Though, the Project Proponent never applied for the Environmental Clearance on the basis of the revised project but the Tamil Nadu

Pollution Control Board during the course of inspection *inter alia* noticed the existence of revised plan of construction and the non-compliance to the conditions contained in the orders of various authorities.

21. In the latest affidavit of the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board that has been placed on record before the Tribunal on 8th April, 2015, it was observed that the unit has almost completed the civil construction work and despite issuance of show cause notice dated 21st May, 2014 and stop work notice issued by Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board, the Project Proponent carried on with the construction work.

Stand of Respondent No. 8 (M/s Dugar Housing Ltd.)

22. The above factual position is hardly disputed by this Respondent. However, the stand taken by the Respondent is that there were vacancy in SEIAA from 2nd March, 2011 to 4th March, 2012 and therefore, they could not have sought Environmental Clearance. The construction was commenced with a view to avoid delay of the project. Though, there was objection from some of the authorities, the construction activity continued in the interest of the developer and the prospective purchasers. It is not disputed by this Project Proponent that resolution dated 12th August, 2013 was submitted to SEIAA. Finally this Respondent has raised the plea of deemed clearance. According to him, he had submitted an application for Environmental Clearance on 7th June, 2013 and it has not been given or denied till date, therefore, it would be deemed to have been granted to him as per Para 8 of Notification of 2006.

Further, it is averred that in the meeting of the SEAC on 30th September, 2013, the project was not granted Environmental Clearance but recommended to SEIAA for grant of Environmental Clearance, therefore, the permission would be deemed to have been granted. It is also the plea of this Respondent that he had obtained No Objection Certificates from the Air Port Authority, Traffic Police, Fire and Rescue Services, Metro Water Supply and Sewerage Board during the year 2011-2012. He had also obtained planning permit from Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority dated 28th January, 2013 and building permission from Corporation of Chennai dated 28th January, 2013. Since the process was taking time, the construction had been started. The Project Proponent had also tendered apology to SEIAA in compliance of the letters dated 12th December, 2012 and 27th June, 2013.

In response to the above contentions raised by the Project Proponent and some of the official Respondents, it has been stated by the Applicant that the plea of vacancies in SEIAA is irrelevant as the application for Environmental Clearance was moved on 7th June, 2013 and thereafter, there was no vacancy in SEIAA, thus, no prejudice is caused to the Project Proponent on that count. The plea of *bona fide* taken by the Project Proponent is of no consequences because upon violation of the law, they cannot take up the plea of *bona fide*, as they intentionally carried on the construction despite objections from the authorities, show cause notice, stop work notice and even their own undertaking to the authorities not to raise any construction. Now the Project Proponent has completed the

construction and therefore, the misrepresentations made by it to the authorities, including the variation in the plot and construction area, would vitiate the permissions that had been granted to the Project Proponent. Since the application for obtaining the Environmental Clearance is still pending for consideration of the authorities and the Project Proponent had been asked to submit documents, the Project Proponent cannot claim any benefit under the garb of 'deeming fiction'. This principle is not applicable to the case of Respondent No. 8 either on facts and/or on law. The meeting of SEIAA held on 30th September, 2013 had clearly noticed the unauthorized construction that they began in violation of the Notification of 2006 and resolution of the Project Proponent dated 12th August, 2013, which fact is undisputable. The plea of 'deeming fiction' and *bona fide* construction can therefore, hardly be taken by this Project Proponent. SEIAA had while requiring the Project Proponent to comply with the Notification of 2006, clearly mandated on 7th June, 2013 that no construction should be carried out. This has been violated by the Respondent No. 8 frequently. The different figures of plot size and construction area having been submitted by the said Respondent to various authorities, shows that he has not approached the authorities with clean hands and *bonafidely*.

23. According to the Applicant, this project of **M/s Ruby Manoharan (Respondent No. 4)** relates to the construction of basement floor + stilt pt + 1st to 15th Floor residential building with 206 Dus (ground floor pt & 1st Floor pt departmental store and 12th floor swimming pool) on Survey No. 64/2, Vengaiwasal Village at

Tamabaram, Velachery Main Road, Vengaivasal, Chennai. It was a project of total built up area of 22,130.944 sq meters on plot of 6,173.40 sq meters. The Project Proponent had moved an application to CMDA for his planning permit, in response to which the Authority on 24th July, 2012 wrote to the Project Proponent to pay development charges and submit other documents. The CMDA on 4th January, 2013 granted planning permit to the project. It needs to be noticed that in the letter dated 24th July, 2012, detailed conditions for compliance were stated which also included a condition that the Project Proponent was to furnish an undertaking that Environmental Clearance would be taken before the said authority could issue the planning permit. After submission of its plan, it appears that the Project Proponent started construction immediately after the issuance of the letter dated 24th July, 2012.

24. On 11th January, 2013, the Project Proponent submitted an application seeking Environmental Clearance. To this application, the authorities (Member Secretary, SEIAA) responded instantaneously and informed the Project Proponent about the necessity to comply with the requirements of the Notification of 2006 and directed the Project Proponent not to raise any construction without obtaining prior Environmental Clearance. The relevant extract of the letter written by SEIAA to the Project Proponent can be usefully reproduced here:

“It shall be noticed that construction activity towards the project implementation without obtaining prior Environmental Clearance is a cognizable offence under Section 19 of Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and is also liable to punishment for contravention of the

provision of the said Act and the Rules or orders and directions, under Section 15, 16 or 17 of the said Act. In the above circumstances, it is hereby instructed that the Proponent shall not commence any activity, other than clearing the site, fencing the site and putting up temporary structure for accommodation of labour, along with basic facilities like toilets and water supply, made as a temporary arrangement.”

25. On 15th May, 2013, SEIAA wrote to the Project Proponent requiring them to file additional documents and submit the requisite technical details for grant of Environmental Clearance. These details, required to be furnished by 3rd June, 2013, were not submitted, thereby resulting in issuance of reminder by SEIAA to Project Proponent on 8th July, 2013. This letter was responded to by the Project Proponent on 17th July, 2013, wherein they clearly stated that they shall initiate the activity on the site only after obtaining Environmental Clearance. In this letter, the built up area was stated to be 35,017 sq meters as against 22,139 sq. meters as stated in the letter of the Project Proponent itself dated 11th January, 2013.

26. The Project Proponent was again informed by SEIAA vide its letter on 22nd July, 2013 that he should not carry out any construction activity at the site other than clearing the site, fencing the site and raising temporary structure for accommodation of labour. On 27th August, 2013, the Project Proponent informed the SEIAA that they had submitted the documents and circulated the same to the members of SEAC. Conceptual Plan was submitted by the Project Proponent to SEIAA on 29th August, 2013, in which discrepancies were pointed out by the SEIAA and it asked the Project Proponent to provide reasons for change in the built up area

vide its letter dated 4th September, 2013. It was also pointed out by SEIAA in this letter that the project is located at a distance of 50 mtrs. from Nanmangalam Reserve Forest and thus Project Proponent was asked to furnish No Objection Certificate (for short 'NOC') from the District Forest Officer (for short 'DFO'). The Project Proponent vide their letter dated 13th September, 2013 responded to the letter dated 4th September, 2013 furnishing the 'NOC' from DFO while stating that this 'NOC' from DFO was not necessary, it being a 'B' category project and in relation to the discrepancy in the built up area, it was stated that the difference in area is the consolidation of the Non-FSI and Free of FSI areas, which are otherwise not mentioned in CMDA approved plan. SEIAA again vide its letter dated 24th September, 2013, directed the Project Proponent to furnish the NOC from the DFO on account of the fact that the project was located at a distance of 50 meters from Nanmangalam Reserve Forest. In response, the Project Proponent vide its letter dated 25th September, 2013 stated that the development is categorised as General Building Construction Project and is not covered under the Notification of 2006.

27. The matter was placed in the 44th meeting of SEAC on 30th September, 2013 asking the Project Proponent to furnish additional documents including NOC from DFO and an undertaking as required and the above was communicated by the SEIAA to the Project Proponent vide its letter dated 7th October, 2013. The Project Proponent thereupon vide their letter dated 21st February, 2014 informed SEIAA that the required resolution from the Board of

Directors has been passed during the meeting held on 24th January, 2014 that they would not commit violation of the Notification of 2006 and also that such violations shall not be repeated. Having noticed various violations and non-compliance by the Project Proponent, SEIAA vide its letter dated 11th March, 2014 wrote to the Additional Chief Secretary to the Government that action should be taken against this Respondent in terms of Section 19 of the Act of 1986. This letter was responded to by the Government on 22nd April, 2014, asking SEIAA to take necessary steps. The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board filed a complaint against this Respondent before the Court of Judicial Magistrate, Court II, Chengalpattu on 17th July, 2014. The Project Proponent filed an affidavit on 22nd July, 2014 stating that they have stopped the construction activity at site as per commitment in the Board Resolution dated 24th January, 2014 and shall carry on construction only upon securing the Environmental Clearance. On 3rd September, 2014, the Project Proponent requested SEIAA to dispose of its application notwithstanding the order passed by this Tribunal dated 21st May, 2014.

In the meanwhile, Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board issued a show cause notice to the Project Proponent. The premises were also inspected on 2nd April, 2015 and it was noticed that the construction had been carried on in the past but was found to be stopped at the time of inspection. From the photographs on record which were filed by the Project Proponent before SEIAA on 6th March, 2014 and the photographs taken during the course of

inspection on 15th April, 2015, it is clear that the Project Proponent has violated its own undertaking, orders and directions of SEIAA, as well as other laws in force. Therefore, the Applicant has submitted that the project of Respondent No. 4 has seriously affected the environment and ecology of area and the entire construction is unauthorised and illegal.

Stand of the Respondent (M/s Ruby Manoharan)

28. The stand of the Respondent Project Proponent is that he had obtained the Planning Permit on 4th January, 2013. The Project Proponent had also obtained Airport Authority clearance with regard to height of the building from Director General of Civil Aviation on 17th October, 2011. He also claims to have obtained clearance from the Fire Department. Before the issuance of planning permit by the CMDA, the proposal was approved by the Government Housing and Urban Development Department of the State of Tamil Nadu vide their letter dated 19th June, 2012. Vide their letter dated 24th July, 2012, the CMDA asked the Project Proponent to pay the development charges for land and building, security deposits as well as infrastructure and amenity charges. As per the terms and conditions of this letter, the Project Proponent was called upon to comply with various directions and it was stated that if the directions were not complied with, the sanction was required to be revoked. Even according to the Project Proponent in an affidavit, it has been admitted that they were required to furnish an undertaking to produce 'NOC' for EIA Clearance before obtaining the completion certificate. The Project Proponent started the construction after receipt of the Planning Permit which was valid till

3rd January, 2016. After obtaining the Planning Permit, it applied for grant of Environmental Clearance to SEIAA on 11th January, 2013. After submission of the said application, the Project Proponent was called upon to submit certain documents and provide more particulars. The application of the Project Proponent was pending when interim order was passed by the Tribunal staying the operation of the impugned. Before the SEIAA, the Project Proponent had filed an apology letter on 21st February, 2014. The Project Proponent filed an application before the Southern Bench of National Green Tribunal seeking for direction to SEIAA for considering its application and disposing it expeditiously. Keeping in view the fact that the interim orders of stay have been passed by the Principal Bench at New Delhi, the Project Proponent also filed an application for impleadment, praying that the interim orders passed by the Tribunal on 15th December, 2014 in M.A. 809 of 2014 in Original Application No. 135 of 2014 be vacated.

29. SEIAA and Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board have taken clear stand that the Project Proponent had carried the construction activity without obtaining Environmental Clearance. The apology filed by the Project Proponent had clearly stated that he will not carry out any construction without obtaining Environmental Clearance and such violation will not be repeated. SEIAA had requested the Government of Tamil Nadu to take action under Section 15 and 19 of the Act of 1986 as per the guidelines of the MoEF against the Project Proponent. According to SEIAA, in view of the interim order passed by the National Green Tribunal, the

application for grant of Environmental Clearance was not processed. According to SEIAA, it had acted in furtherance to the issued by MoEF dated 12th December, 2012 and 27th June, 2013 to consider the application submitted by the Project Proponent. But this application has been de-listed from the pending list of projects, as they are awaiting orders of the National Green Tribunal. The Project Proponent had been informed by various letters including that of 19th November, 2014, not to proceed with the project construction. The site was inspected on 15th April, 2014 and it was noticed that the civil structural work for all the blocks were completed. In reliance thereto, SEIAA has submitted certain photographs.

30. According to the Tami Nadu Pollution Control Board, they had conducted the inspection on 2nd April, 2015 and they noticed that no construction work was going on at the time of inspection. They have also taken photographs in reliance thereto. They were also informed by the Project Proponent on 2nd April, 2015 that all the construction work had been stopped w.e.f 4th April, 2014.

31. According to the Applicant, the project of **M/s Jones Foundation (P) Ltd (Respondent No. 5)** was for construction of Group Development residential project constituting six blocks, stilt + 7 floors out of which 329 are dwelling units, a clubhouse and a ground floor plus one residential building in S. Nos. 170/1A1F2, 1B, 2B, 1C1, 1C2, 2C1, 2C2, 172, 173/1A1, 1A2, 1B1, 1B2, 1C, 1D, 1E&2; at Pallikaranai Village, Tambaram Taluk, Kancheepuram District, Tamil Nadu. The total project area is 20,895.02 sq meters

with built up area of 35,848.88 sq meters with a project cost of Rs. 140 crores. The Project Proponent filed an application seeking planning permission from the CMDA on 19th May, 2010. This remained pending and various correspondences were exchanged between the parties. The planning permission according to the Project Proponent was issued on 3rd August, 2012. In terms of this letter of the CMDA, Project Proponent was required to deposit various charges like development and plot regularisation etc. The Project Proponent was to construct strictly in accordance with the sanctioned plan and no deviation was to be made. Further, it was stipulated that even the building would not be occupied without issuance of the completion certificate by the said authority. Rain water conservation measures as notified by the CMDA were expected to be adhered to strictly. Undertaking was required to be furnished for NOC from the IAF and EIA clearance before the issue of the Completion Certificate. In the event of non-compliance of the conditions, the sanction was liable to be revoked. The Project Proponent started the construction immediately thereafter and carried on with the same. The application for grant of Environmental Clearance was submitted on 3rd February, 2014 which was responded to by SEIAA vide its letter dated 5th February, 2014, directing the Project Proponent not to raise any construction, other than cleaning the site, fencing the site and putting up temporary structure for accommodation of labour. It will be useful to refer to the relevant part of the said letter:

“Your attention is drawn to the EIA Notification dated 14th September, 2006 along with amendments thereon,

notified by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, wherein it has Imposed certain restrictions and prohibitions on new projects or activities, or on the expansion or modernization of existing projects or activities based on their potential environmental impacts as indicated in the Schedule to the notification, being undertaken in any part of India, unless prior environmental clearance has been accorded in accordance with the objectives of National Environment Policy.

The Government of India, Ministry of Environment and Forests in various circulars have repeatedly emphasized that any activity started or being executed before obtaining an Environmental Clearance from the Competent Regulatory Authority i.e. State Level Environment Impact Assessment Authority shall be construed as a violation, as per the provision of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. The Ministry has also delegated required powers and instructed the concerned State Government to take legal action against such proponent who has started project activity without a prior Environmental Clearance for violation, by invoking powers under Section 19 of Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

It shall be noticed that activity towards the project implementation without obtaining prior Environmental Clearance is a cognizable offence under section 19 of Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and is also liable to punishment for contravention of the provision of the said Act and the Rules or Orders and directions, under section 15, 16 or 17 of the said Act. In the above circumstances, it is hereby instructed that the Proponent shall not commence any activity, other than cleaning the site, fencing the site and putting up temporary structure for accommodation of labour, along with basic facilities like toilets and water supply, made as a temporary arrangement.

The receipt of this communication should be acknowledged immediately.”

32. Vide their letter dated 10th February, 2014, the SEIAA asked the Project Proponent to submit additional documents as well as the photographs of the construction and a resolution/ undertaking of the Project Proponent. In compliance to these directions, on 27th February, 2014, the Project Proponent submitted an affidavit along with photographs showing status of the site and also other

documents. SEIAA vide their letter dated 4th March, 2014, informed the Project Proponent that construction had commenced and this was in clear breach of the Notification of 2006 and they were asked to furnish a letter of commitment and expression of apology for the same and then alone the proposal would be considered any further. On 10th March, 2014, the Project Proponent submitted an apology and requested that issuance of Environmental Clearance may be considered. The letter of commitment and expression tendered by the Project Proponent read as under:

“LETTER OF COMMITMENT AND EXPRESSION OF APOLOGY

We understand the violations on the part of making substantial construction in our project at Survey No.s- 170/1C2, 170/1A1F2, 170/2C2, 170/2B, 172, 170/1B, 170/2C2, 170/1C1, 173/1D, 173/1A1, 1A2, 173/1B1,1B2, 173/1E, 2, 173/1C of Pallikarnai Village, Tambaram Taluk, Kanchipuram District, Tamil Nadu in West Anna Nagar, (Near Chettinadu Enclave), Door No: 190 Zone-14 Corporation of Chennai , which is a Multi-storeyed Residential Apartment , with (6-Blvocks –Stilt + 7 Floors and a Club House) for residential purpose with 329 dwelling units by M/s Jones Foundations Private Limited without obtaining prior Environmental Clearance under EIA notification 2006.

The subject was taken up in a meeting held by the Board of Directors of M/s. Jones Foundations Private Limited on 24/02/2014 for consideration of the environment related policy / of action and resolved to ensure that such violations will not be repeated in future.

We here by express our apology for the violations carried out by construction of the project without obtaining prior Environmental Clearance under EIA Notification 2006 and request SEIAA, Tamil Nadu to consider the issuance of the Environmental Clearance for the said project.”

33. The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board conducted an inspection and issued a show cause notice on 16th July, 2014, clearly evidencing that the construction work was continuing even

as on 15th July, 2014. In the show cause notice, the Project Proponent was required to answer as to why the prosecution should not be initiated against him by filing a complaint as per the powers conferred under Section 19 (a) of the Act of 1986 and as to why recommendation should not be made to the MoEF, Government of India/Government of Tamil Nadu, for the issuance of directions under Section 5 of the Act of 1986 to suspend the construction activity till such time Environmental Clearance is obtained. Reply to this show cause notice was submitted by the Project Proponent on 26th July, 2014, in which it was said that they have already submitted the application in Form I and IA along with a conceptual plan to SEIAA, Tamil Nadu and that they were waiting for grant of Environmental Clearance to the Project. In this letter, it was stated that they have stopped all construction activities pertaining to the project after the show cause notice and that construction would be started only after grant of Environmental Clearance. The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board during inspection noticed that the main civil construction work for the residential complex was almost completed and found works such as interior finishing and site cleaning work were going on. The inspection report submitted on 2nd April, 2015 resulted in a stop work notice being issued to the Project Proponent by the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board. The photographs submitted by the Project Proponent to SEIAA on 5th January, 2014 and the photographs taken by SEIAA on 15th April, 2015 along with the report of SEIAA, clearly show that the construction work is in violation of the law and is continued illegally

during all this time and this has caused irreparable loss and damage to environment and ecology. The SEIAA vide its letter dated 18th November, 2014 had informed the Project Proponent that his project stands de-listed for grant of Environmental Clearance and would be considered only after further orders of the Tribunal.

The Project Proponent had relied upon the office order dated 21st January, 2010 issued by the Member Secretary, Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority approving the norms and procedures evolved in terms of the guidance of the Monitoring Committee to contend that they had taken permissions from the concerned authorities to raise constructions with reference to this office order dated 21st January, 2010. The office order related to issuance of completion certificate on the basis of these revised guidelines. The office order provided that the insistence for compliance report from other agencies, including CMDA, Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board, Revenue Department and ELCOT was proposed to be dispensed with. The Project Proponent also claimed that he had obtained other statutory clearances for the purposes of construction and construction had been carried out on the basis of the approved drawings. The Project Proponent conceded in his Application M.A. No. 110 of 2015 that he had commenced and had almost completed the construction activity by investing huge sums of money and has employed large number of labourers as on 3rd February, 2014 when he applied for obtaining the Environmental Clearance. The Project Proponent submits that he was under *bona fide* impression that Environmental Clearance

would be given since all particulars have been complied with. Rest of the facts afore-referred are not disputed. The Respondent stated that the main application of the Applicant was not maintainable and the same should be dismissed.

34. According to the Applicant, **M/s SSM Builders and Promoters (Respondent No. 6)** is a registered partnership firm engaged in the business as civil engineering contractors, lay out promoters, flat promoters, real-estate and housing/commercial project developers. In November, 2012, the Project Proponent submitted a plan for approval to the CMDA for the project 'SSM Housing Complex at Perungalthur, Chennai'. The project was envisaged in an area of 49.28 acres. The proposed housing complex contemplated 59 blocks, out of which 6 blocks were for LIG housing with GF + 3 floors and balance 53 blocks with stilt plus 4 floors comprising of a total 2952 flats. There are six commercial blocks and one club house. The total built up area of the project comes to 37.84 lakhs sq ft. The estimated project cost involved was Rs. 792.56 crores. The application for planning permission was filed with the CMDA on 2nd November, 2012 and revision of this application was sought on 11th December, 2012, 27th December, 2012 and 7th February, 2013. On 11th March, 2013, necessary fee for process was demanded by CMDA from the Project Proponent. On 5th August, 2013, the Planning Permission was granted to the Project Proponent in relation to the project in question. Project Proponent had submitted the application for grant of Environmental Clearance on 24th July, 2013. According to the Applicant, the Project Proponent claims that

he had collected samples for making available for baseline data from July to September, 2013 and that it had commenced construction by 13th August, 2013. However, the Applicant has submitted that the Project Proponent had erroneously classified the project as a category 'B2' project under clause 8(b) of the Schedule to the Notification of 2006, while in Column (2) of Form 1, the Project was categorised as 8(a) under the Schedule of Notification of 2006. It is also averred by the Applicant that the samples have been collected much subsequent to the application for grant of Environmental Clearance and are even pre-dated to the TOR. Furthermore, as they were not collected by an accredited consultant they cannot be used for EIA report. On 1st August, 2013, SEIAA asked for additional documents and particulars so as to proceed with the case. These documents are stated to have been submitted on 20th August, 2013. SEIAA vide its letter dated 19th September, 2013 stated that the ToRs as well as the clarifications should also be furnished in the EIA report. On the basis of the said EIA Report, the Project Proponent was required to take further necessary actions for obtaining Environmental Clearance. The Project Proponent on 14th February, 2014 submitted a Rapid EIA report. On 24th February, 2014, the partners of the Project Proponent passed a Board Resolution expressly apologizing for violations of the Notification of 2006 by commencing construction work without grant of Environmental Clearance and undertook not to commit further violation. In fact, on 19th March, 2014, 'letter of commitment and expression of apology' was submitted to SEIAA. The Tamil Nadu

Pollution Control Board on 11th July, 2014 conducted an inspection of the project. On the basis of this inspection, the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board issued a notice dated 15th July, 2014 referring to the whole background, the breaches and violation committed by this Project Proponent and the fact that during inspection on 11th July, 2014, it was found that the residential complex project was under progress without obtaining Environmental Clearance which was violative of Notification of 2006 and documents submitted by the Project Proponent. The Project Proponent thus, was required to show cause within 15 days as to why prosecution should not be launched by filing a complaint as contemplated under Section 19 of the Act of 1986 and also why recommendation should not be made to the MoEF for issuance of direction under section 5 of Act of 1986 stopping operation of the project till such Environmental Clearance is obtained. Reply to this show cause notice was submitted by Project Proponent on 22nd July, 2014. It was stated therein that in response to the issuance of the TOR, the Project Proponent had submitted rapid Environmental Impact Assessment report on 14th February, 2014 and were awaiting Environmental Clearance. It was further stated that they have stopped all construction activity pertaining to the said project and no construction would be carried out without obtaining the Environmental Clearance. On 25th November, 2014, SEIAA issued a letter to the Project Proponent stating that their application stands de-listed and would be processed only after further orders of the National Green Tribunal.

35. Under the orders of the Tribunal, the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board had also conducted an inspection of the premises of Respondent No. 6 on 2nd April, 2015. Photographs were also taken by SEIAA on 14th April, 2015. Photographs submitted by the Project Proponent on 26th March, 2014 and the photographs taken on 14th April, 2015 by SEIAA clearly show that there has been frequent violation of the laws in force, Notification of 2006 and even the undertaking of apology given by the Project Proponent itself.

36. On 2nd April, 2015, the inspecting team of Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board found that the work had been stopped and the photographs taken had supported such observations made by the inspecting team.

Stand of M/s SSM Builders and Promoters (Respondent No. 6)

37. The Project Proponent has taken a stand that it was under a *bona fide* impression that he could commence construction on making an application for Environmental Clearance to SEIAA and once the Planning Permit had been granted by the CMDA. According to Respondent No. 6, he had paid the processing fee of Rs. 5 Lakhs on 27th July, 2013 and after receiving the letter from the CMDA on 5th August, 2013, it had started construction. Submission of documents including rapid Environmental Impact Assessment and issuance of TOR was a genuine basis for the Project Proponent to start construction. Relying upon the dated 12th December, 2012, it is stated that the 'letter of commitment and expression of apology' was submitted on 19th March, 2014. According to the Project Proponent, green space had been left

between the buildings so that there is reduced heat gain. The buildings are designed to maximize the use of solar power, rain water harvesting system have been made and STP's installed to recycle water. According to the Project Proponent, out of 2952 flats and 135 shops, 1566 flats and 82 shops have already been sold and undivided share in the land has been conveyed to the buyers. Thus, third party interests have been created. According to the Project Proponent he would be gravely prejudiced by non-processing of the Environmental Clearance application and has submitted that dated 12th December, 2012 as amended on 27th June, 2013, is in consonance with the Notification of 2006 and the Project Proponent is entitled to the benefit of the process as envisaged under the impugned Office Memoranda. According to the Project Proponent, the main application should thus be dismissed.

38. **S.A.S Pvt. Ltd. (Respondent No. 9)** had filed its application through its authorised signatory which was allowed. The application for intervention/impleadment was filed in furtherance of the interim order dated 21st May, 2014 passed by the Southern Zone Bench at Chennai. Thereafter, vide order dated 15th December, 2014, the operation of the impugned orders dated 12th December, 2012 and 27th June, 2013 was stayed by the Principal Bench.

39. According to the Applicant, the project of this Respondent at Village Saligramam, Chennai was for development of residential complex consisting of construction of 2 block with combined lower and upper basements and Block 1 – ground plus 17 floors, block 2

– basement plus ground floor plus 2 floors – Service, Gym and swimming Pool providing 166 residential units. The total project area is 6,985 sq meters with built up area of the project is 28,330.95 sq meters. The estimated cost of the project was 90 crores. According to the Applicant, the planning permission from the CMDA was obtained by the Project Proponent on 30th March, 2012, in furtherance to which building license was obtained by the Project Proponent from Corporation of Chennai on 23rd May, 2012. Thereafter, the Project Proponent commenced the construction without even applying for Environmental Clearance. The Project Proponent applied to SEIAA for obtaining Environmental Clearance on 4th July, 2012. No acknowledgement thereof had been placed on record by the Project Proponent. From the letter of the SEIAA dated 13th March, 2013, it is clear that the application with documents was of 13th March, 2013 itself. In terms of this letter, a bank draft towards the processing fee that was given by the Project Proponent itself, was dated 13th February, 2013. In this very letter, SEIAA had informed the Project Proponent that it shall not commence any construction other than cleaning the site or fencing the site. It was specifically re-emphasized that any construction activity started or being executed before obtaining Environmental Clearance from the competent authority would be in violation of the Act and the Notification. Vide letter dated 19th March, 2013, the Project Proponent was asked to furnish additional documents and additional fee on or before 15th April, 2013 failing which the application would be recorded as closed. The Applicant has stated

that till that date, no clarifications were filed nor the fee submitted. On 25th June, 2013, the Project Proponent passed a Board Resolution expressing apology and submitting an undertaking not to repeat any violation and not to raise any constructions. In this letter of commitment and expression of apology, the Project Proponent prayed for consideration of the issue relating to Environmental Clearance. However, on 18th November, 2014, SEIAA informed the Project Proponent that the project had been de-listed. During the inspection on 14th April, 2015, photographs had been taken which if compared with the photographs submitted by the Project Proponent on 6th May, 2013 reveal that there was clear violation of the law, Notification of 2006 as well as the undertaking given by the Project Proponent.

40. According to the authorities including Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board and the SEIAA, they came to know of unauthorized construction by the Project Proponent on 13th May, 2013. On 21st May, 2013, Project Proponent had submitted certain photographs taken at the project site. SEIAA while following the guidelines issued by the MoEF had asked the Project Proponent to furnish certain documents. The Project Proponent submitted their Board Resolution dated 25th June, 2013 which was received by the SEIAA on 2nd August, 2013. Thereafter, Member Secretary, SEIAA vide letter dated 8th August, 2013 requested the State Government to take action for violation of the Notification of 2006. Vide letter dated 10th September, 2013, the State Government requested the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board to take legal action against the

Project Proponent in terms of Section 19 of the Act of 1986 for having commenced the construction without obtaining prior Environmental Clearance. Thereafter, the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board vide its letter dated 3rd June, 2014 informed the Member Secretary, SEIAA, Tamil Nadu that District Environmental Engineer, Chennai has filed a Criminal Complaint in the Judicial Magistrate Court at Saidapet against Respondent No. 9 on 26th May, 2014. It is averred by the authorities that upon compliance with the requirements pointed out by the authorities, the application for Environmental Clearance of the Project Proponent was placed before SEIAA in its 45th Meeting held on 29th – 30th October, 2013. According to SEIAA, the project site was inspected on 14th April, 2015 in the presence of Project Proponent's representative (Site Engineer). It was noticed that civil structural works (core and shell) of all 2 blocks were completed, though at the time of inspection, no work had been carried on. Photographs were taken during the inspection and have been submitted before the Tribunal. The Project Proponent was informed vide letter dated 18th November, 2014 not to proceed with the project construction work, which had not been adhered to. The photographs furnished by the Project Proponent at time of submission of the expression of apology on 6th May, 2013, show that the construction work was structurally in progress but without any walls or without even completion of pillars of any floor. However, photographs taken on 14th April, 2015 show that the building was majorly finished from outside and

inside, which was clearly in violation of the law and the undertaking furnished by the Project Proponent.

Stand of Respondent No. 9 (SAS Realtors Pvt. Ltd.)

41. The stand of the Project Proponent is that he had obtained various approvals from the local authorities since 2011 along with Planning Permission from the CMDA on 30th March, 2012 and Planning Permit from the Chennai Corporation on 23rd May, 2012. The Project Proponent commenced construction activity in compliance with these approvals to meet the timelines promised to its clients for timely delivery of the residential apartments. The authorities thereafter informed the Project Proponent that he is required to obtain Environmental Clearance. The Project Proponent had submitted the application for Environmental Clearance to the SEIAA on 4th July, 2012 but because of the change in the fees payable, the Project Proponent filed a fresh application on 18th February, 2013. In compliance to the Office Memorandum dated 12th December, 2012, it submitted a 'letter of commitment and an expression of apology' on 25th June, 2013, for having commenced construction activity before the receipt of the Environmental Clearance. Thereafter, it was informed to the Project Proponent by the authorities that its application was not processed in view of the stay orders of the Tribunal and that further action would be taken in accordance with further orders of the Tribunal.

42. Further, according to the Project Proponent, action of SEIAA in refusing the grant of Environmental Clearance is violative of legitimate expectation of the Project Proponent, after they have

complied with all the requirements of the dated 12th December, 2012. Since SEIAA failed to comply with the timeline of maximum 105 days provided under Para 8 of the Notification of 2006, the deemed approval would operate in favour of the Project Proponent when there is no rejection of the application from the authorities. According to the Project Proponent the action of SEIAA in delisting its project is violative of Article 14 of the Constitution of India. It is also the submission of the Project Proponent that they have taken all steps in furtherance to dated 12th December, 2012 and therefore, they are entitled to grant of Environmental Clearance and SEIAA has erroneously linked it to the orders of stay passed by the Tribunal. A feeble attempt has been made on behalf of this Respondent to point out that the Notification of 2006 does not apply to residential building projects and it extends only to location of 'industries' or on carrying on of processes and operations. Furthermore, that the Notification of 2006 goes beyond the purview of Rule 5(3) of the Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986 and hence it is *ultra vires*. According to the Project Proponent their application for EC was considered by the SEIAA in its 45th meeting held on 29th – 30th October, 2013 and whatever requirements were to be complied with by the Project Proponent had been complied with. The interim orders of stay on the impugned Office Memoranda by the Tribunal were only in relation to category 'A' projects which require Environmental Impact Assessment, public consultations and Consent to Establish. The project in question is not covered under this category and therefore, the view taken by the Official

Respondents was not correct. The Project Proponent had so claimed even before the authorities.

43. The Project Proponent in its application had submitted that they would challenge the validity and correctness of the Notification of 2006 but no such steps were taken by the Applicant till the conclusion of the arguments.

44. Upon analysis of the case advanced on behalf of the respective parties and as is evident from the pleadings and records before us, we may concisely note the arguments advanced. It is contended on behalf of the Applicant that the Office Memorandum dated 12th December, 2012 and as amended by Office Memorandum dated 27th June, 2013 which provides grant of ex-post facto Environmental Clearance in terms of the Notification of 2006 and the CRZ Notification of 2011 are contrary to these Notifications, themselves. These Office Memoranda at best are administrative orders and therefore, cannot amend or modify the Notifications. It is further the contention of the Applicant that these Office Memoranda are in derogation not only to the Notification of 2006 and the CRZ Notification of 2011 but even of India's International obligations. The Office Memoranda are neither problem solving nor are they compliant with law. These Office Memoranda are not executive orders issued under the authority of Article 73 of the Constitution of India, as these Orders have neither been authenticated by the required authority nor have they complied with the procedure for exercise of executive power under that Article. In fact, they amend the statutory Notification of 2006. The Office Memoranda, in fact,

destroy the very object of the Act of 1986, Notification of 2006 and they have the effect of not only going beyond scope of the Notification of 2006 but even are clearly in derogation to the procedure prescribed under it. The language of the impugned Office Memoranda suggests that they have not been issued in exercise of the powers vested in the Ministry under Section 5 of the Act of 1986 and they are not issued as per the prescribed procedure. They also do not supply the gaps, if any, in the Notification of 2006.

45. According to the Applicants, impugned Office Memoranda are arbitrary and they do not provide for any guidelines. They have an inbuilt element of discrimination and they vest unguided and unfettered discretion with the concerned authority.

Contra to these contentions, the submission on behalf of the Respondents (private Respondents) is that the Office Memoranda have been issued by the MoEF in exercise of its executive powers under Article 73 of the Constitution of India. The source of power of the Union of India to issue such Memorandum is relatively under Article 73 of the Constitution of India, as the executive power of the Union extends to matters on which Parliament is competent to legislate under Article 246 of the Constitution. Furthermore, the impugned Office Memoranda do not have the effect of supplanting or even diluting the mandate of the Notification of 2006. On the contrary, they are in consonance with and in furtherance of the Notification of 2006 and supplement it. The requirement of prior Environmental Clearance is not diluted by these Office Memoranda

since they do not permit commencement of project prior to grant of Environmental Clearance. It is further the contention of the Project Proponents that the situations which are not specifically contemplated under the Notification of 2006 are dealt with by the Office Memoranda. In other words, the Office Memoranda supply the gaps in the Notification of 2006 and further the cause of the Notification. The Office Memoranda do not pose any fetters on the powers conferred on the State or Central Government under the Act of 1986 or the Notification of 2006. They, in fact, direct enforcement of Section 15 and 19 of the Act of 1986 to prosecute the violators.

46. The Project Proponents - Respondents have also contended that they have acted in furtherance to the Office Memoranda, followed the requisite procedure and have invested huge amounts and as such the Tribunal should permit the grant of Environmental Clearance to these projects and dismiss the application of the Applicants.

47. Some of the Respondents have taken up the plea of deeming fiction as contained in Para 8 (iii) of the Notification of 2006 to contend that the Environmental Clearance would be deemed to have been granted to them as their applications were not disposed off within the specified time. Some of the Respondents have also contended that the Notification of 2006 is not applicable to their projects which are for building residential complexes.

Still, some of the Respondents have further contended that the Notification of 2006 is invalid and is liable to be set aside on the

ground of discrimination, vagueness etc. Respondent no. 9 having raised this plea in its application, had reserved its right to challenge the validity and correctness of Notification 2006, however, till the matter was reserved for judgment, neither any such effort was made by such Respondent nor actual application was filed challenging the Notification of 2006. Thus, we do not propose to go into the challenge to the Notification of 2006 in these petitions of the Respondents. Respondent no. 9 has even relied upon the said Notification of 2006 to contend that the Office Memoranda are valid, issued by the Competent Authority in exercise of its powers and are supplementing the Notification of 2006. In these circumstances it is neither necessary nor required by the Tribunal to examine the correctness or otherwise of Notification of 2006.

48. According to the MoEF, the Office Memoranda have been issued in exercise of the powers conferred upon the Ministry and are hence, executive instructions. According to the Ministry, they supplement the Notification of 2006.

49. The State of Tamil Nadu and Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board have not taken any specific stand in their replies in relation to the validity of Office Memoranda but have stated that the other private Respondents being violators, they have taken action against them as per the directives of the MoEF in the impugned Office Memoranda. The private Respondents have violated the conditions of the Notification of 2006 and they have taken action against them under Section 19 and 25 of the Act of 1986. SEIAA has taken up the stand that because of violations of the Office Memoranda, they

have taken action against the private Respondents (Project Proponents) and have de-listed their projects from the grant of Environmental Clearance. During the course of inspection these authorities have taken photographs and submitted inspection reports to the Tribunal. It is stated that tenure of SEIAA had ended on 3rd April, 2015 and is under process of being re-constituted.

50. As evidenced from the facts averred and the stand taken by respective parties, the entire controversy revolves around the validity, enforcement and consequences of the impugned Office Memoranda afore-referred. To put it precisely, the stand of the MoEF and the private Respondents 3 to 9 is that the Office Memoranda dated 12th December, 2012 and 27th June, 2013 have been issued by the Ministry in exercise of its Executive Power under Article 73 of the Constitution of India. These Office Memoranda are having the force of law and are merely explanatory or supplementary to the Notification of 2006. These Office Memoranda provide and facilitate grant of Environmental Clearance through the same process as contemplated under Notification of 2006 to the projects which have already commenced construction without obtaining prior Environmental Clearance. It is contended that Office Memoranda further the cause of the Notification of 2006 and the provisions of law. The Office Memoranda are neither violative nor are in contradiction to the Act of 1986, the Rules framed thereunder, or the Notification of 2006.

51. Some of the private Respondents have also contended that the Office Memoranda have been issued in conformity with Section 3

and 5 of the Act of 1986, that issuance of such Memoranda is aided by the 'doctrine of implied or necessary powers' and that they are also entitled to the grant of Environmental Clearance as a result of 'deeming fiction' under Para 8 of the Notification of 2006.

Further, the contention of the private Respondents in particular is that they had started the projects after taking clearance as well as different permissions from various authorities and in accordance with law. At some stage of the construction, they had also filed applications for obtaining Environmental Clearance from the concerned authorities. The Terms of Reference of the building permission from CMDA even prescribed that Environmental Clearance should be taken before grant of Completion Certificate. The constructions carried out by them, though without obtaining Environmental Clearance, were for *bona fide* reasons and keeping in view the fact that not only the Project Proponents but even third parties had heavily invested in these projects. For the above reasons, they claimed to be entitled to the benefit of the Office Memoranda and consequently for protection to their construction projects.

On the contrary, the submission of the Applicants is that the impugned Office Memoranda issued by the Ministry are merely administrative orders and are in violation of the provisions of the Act of 1986, the Rules framed thereunder and in particular, the Notification of 2006. The Office Memoranda not only dilute the provisions of the Notification of 2006 but completely upset the scheme of environmental protection as contemplated under the

environmental laws. On their plain reading, they are *ultra vires* the Notification of 2006 and the Ministry had no jurisdiction to issue such Office Memoranda. These Office Memoranda are not supplementing but are supplanting the Notification of 2006. Such exercise of powers is impermissible in law. Further, the contention of the Applicants is that while some of the private Respondents did not even apply for Environmental Clearance and went on to raise the construction of their respective projects being fully aware and being put to notice that they were not entitled to carry on such construction work, the other Project Proponents completely ignored and / or violated their legal obligations and applied for grant of Environmental Clearance at a stage when their respective projects were reaching structural completion. In law, none of the private Respondents could have undertaken any activity, much less construction activity, of their projects, except the preparation of the site etc, prior to grant of Environmental Clearance. All these Respondents have violated the law and raised constructions illegally and in an unauthorised manner. It is the case of the Applicant that the plea of *bona fide* belief in raising construction is a sham. Not only the private Respondents started construction but even violated their own undertaking given to the SEIAA by continuing with the construction, in fact, with a greater vigour to complete their projects and render all environmental restrictions and laws otiose. The plea of investment by third parties is equally unfounded and *mala fide*. They have invested amounts and even mislead the public at large for making investments being fully aware of the fact that the entire

construction is illegal and unauthorised. These constructions have resulted in serious adverse environmental impacts and are prejudicial to the ecology and biodiversity of the area in question.

52. Applicants have seriously contended that neither a deeming fiction nor the doctrine of necessity applies to the facts and circumstances of the case. There was no compliance to the provisions of Section 3 and 5 of the Act of 1986 and thus, these cannot be directions issued under the stated provisions. In fact, that is not even the case of MoEF, the issuing authority. Thus, the application should be allowed and the Respondents should be held liable for violation of law, raising unauthorised and illegal construction and degrading and damaging the environment and ecology, in addition to the principal prayer that the Office Memoranda be quashed.

53. In order to analytically examine the correctness and merit of the rival contentions raised, it would be appropriate for us to formulate the issues that fall for consideration of the Tribunal. Precisely, they can be stated as under:

1. Whether the Office Memoranda dated 12th December, 2012 and 27th June, 2013 have been issued by the MoEF in exercise of its statutory, executive or administrative power and the effect thereof?
2. Are the above Office Memoranda *ultra vires*, violative and in any manner in derogation of or destructive to the Notification of 2006, provisions of the Act of 1986 or Rules framed thereunder?

Do the impugned Office Memoranda supplement or supplant the Notification of 2006? If so, the consequences thereof.

3. Whether this Tribunal has no jurisdiction to quash both the impugned Office Memoranda?
4. Are the private Respondents entitled to claim any benefit on the strength of deeming provisions as contained in Para 8 (iii) of the Notification of 2006 and if so, to what effect?
5. Whether the provisions of Notification of 2006 requiring Environmental Clearance prior to commencement of construction are mandatory or directory and consequences thereof?
6. What is the status of structures raised by and the conduct of the private Respondents and its effect in law (statutory provisions relating to environment)?
7. What are the environmental impacts of the projects in question upon environment, ecology and biodiversity?
8. What relief, if any, any of the parties to the present proceedings are entitled to?
9. What directions, if any, need to be issued by the Tribunal in the peculiar facts and circumstances of the present case?

DISCUSSION ON ISSUES

Discussion on Issue Nos. 1 and 2.

- 1. Whether the Office Memoranda dated 12th December, 2012 and 27th June, 2013 have been issued by the MoEF in exercise of its statutory, executive or administrative power and the effect thereof?**

2. Are the above Office Memoranda *ultra vires*, violative and in any manner in derogation of or destructive to the Notification of 2006, provisions of the Act of 1986 or Rules framed thereunder?

Do the impugned Office Memoranda supplement or supplant the Notification of 2006? If so, the consequences thereof.

54. The decision on these issues would in fact be a linchpin of the entire judgment. If the Office Memoranda dated 12th December, 2012 and 27th June, 2013 are held to be valid and issued in exercise of the Executive Powers of the MoEF, then different consequences in law and on facts would follow. While a completely different set of consequences would ensue if a contrary view is taken.

55. According to the MoEF, these Office Memoranda are issued in exercise of its Executive Power. Some private Respondents supported this stand while others contend that these are the directions issued by the Ministry in terms of Section 3 and 5 of the Act of 1986. However, the MoEF and private Respondents commonly contend that these Office Memoranda are supplemental to and are intended to further the cause of the Notification of 2006.

In opposition to this, the Applicants contend that these Office Memoranda have been issued in exercise of the Administrative Power of the MoEF. They are *ultra vires* and violative of the Notification of 2006. They supplant the Notification of 2006 and defeat the very purpose of obtaining prior Environmental Clearance

for commencement of the projects of a like nature, as contemplated under the Notification of 2006.

56. Now, we may notice the historical background to the issuance of these impugned Office Memoranda. The Indian Parliament enacted the Act of 1986 to provide for the protection and improvement of the environment and for matters connected therewith. This law is enacted in furtherance to the decisions taken at the United Nations Conference on Human Environment held at Stockholm in June, 1972, to which India was a party. The object of the Act was to protect and improve environment and for prevention of hazards to human beings, other living creatures, plants and property. The term 'environment' in terms of Section 2(a) was defined to include water, air and land and the inter-relationship which exists among and between water, air and land, and human beings, other living creatures, plants, micro-organism and property. In exercise of the powers conferred by Sections 6 and 25 of the Act of 1986, the Central Government made the Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986 (for short 'Rules of 1986'). Further, in exercise of the powers vested in the Central Government under Sub Section 1 and Clause (v) of Sub-section (2) of Section 3 of the Act of 1986, read with clause (d) of sub-rule (3) of Rule 5 of the Rules of 1986, the Central Government issued the Environment Impact Assessment Notification dated 27th January, 1994. This Notification requires any person who desire to undertake any new projects in any part of India or the expansion or modernisation of any existing industry or project listed in Schedule I to make an application to

the MoEF in the proforma specified in Schedule II of the said Notification. Schedule I provides the list of the projects that requires Environmental Clearance from the Central Government. Under entry 18, all tourism projects between 200 metres and 500 metres of High Water Line and at locations with an elevation of more than 1000 metres with investment of more than Rs.5 crores required Environmental Clearance. Similarly, under entry No. 21, Highway Projects except projects relating to improvement work including widening and strengthening of roads with marginal land acquisition along the existing alignments, provided it does not pass through ecologically sensitive areas such as National Parks, Sanctuaries, Tiger Reserves, Reserve Forests also required Environmental Clearance. Except these two entries, the construction projects of any other nature were not included in any entry of this Schedule. The Notification of 1994 in contradistinction to the Notification of 2006 had not specifically used the word 'prior Environmental Clearance'. The Notification of 1994 was issued by the Ministry after inviting objection from the public within 60 days from the date of publication of the Notification. Taking notice of lacunas, shortfalls and other practical aspects and difficulties while keeping in mind the interest of environment, the MoEF again issued a draft Notification dated 15th September, 2005 inviting objection and suggestions from all the persons likely to be affected by this draft Notification within a period of 60 days. The significance of this Notification was that the Union Cabinet had approved the National Environmental Policy on 18th May, 2006 proposing restrictions and

prohibitions to be imposed on new projects and activities and even on expansion or modernisation of existing projects or activities with reference to their potential environmental impacts which stated that the project and activity should not be undertaken unless prior Environmental Clearance has been granted in accordance with the objectives of the policy. After examining the objections and suggestions received, the Central Government on 14th September, 2006 issued a final Notification referred herein as the Notification of 2006 (supra). Clause 2 of this Notification required obtaining of prior Environmental Clearance from the concerned regulatory authority depending upon the nature of the project. Clause 2 of the said Notification reads as under:

“Requirements of prior Environmental Clearance (EC):- The following projects or activities shall require prior environmental clearance from the concerned regulatory authority, which shall hereinafter referred to be as the Central Government in the Ministry of Environment and Forests for matters falling under Category ‘A’ in the Schedule and at State level the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) for matters falling under Category ‘B’ in the said Schedule, before any construction work, or preparation of land by the project management except for securing the land, is started on the project or activity:

- (i) All new projects or activities listed in the Schedule to this notification;
- (ii) Expansion and modernization of existing projects or activities listed in the Schedule to this notification with addition of capacity beyond the limits specified for the concerned sector, that is, projects or activities which cross the threshold limits given in the Schedule, after expansion or modernization;
- (iii) Any change in product - mix in an existing manufacturing unit included in Schedule beyond the specified range.”

57. Clause 4 of the Notification of 2006 contemplates that all projects and activities be broadly categorized into two categories -

Category 'A' and Category 'B', based on the spatial extent of potential impacts on human health and natural and manmade resources. Clause 4(iii) prescribes that all the projects or activities included as Category 'B' in the Schedule, including expansion and modernization of existing projects or activities would require prior Environmental Clearance from SEIAA and prior Environmental Clearance is required even if there is a change in product mix except in the expansion carved out therein. Upon submission of the application for Environmental Clearance by the Project Proponent, the Expert Appraisal Committee is to follow four steps procedure i.e. Screening, Scoping, Public Consultation and Appraisal of the application. Environmental Clearance is to be applied for in the prescribed Form 1 under Appendix 1 and Form 1A in accordance with Appendix II to the Notification of 2006. Such application is to be filed for grant of prior Environmental Clearance before commencing any construction activity or preparation of land at the site by the Project Proponent in terms of Clause 6 of the Notification of 2006. It has to be noticed here that Form 1 and 1A require a lot of information to be supplied in relation to the project, land area and activity that is proposed to be commenced by the Project Proponent. Such information *inter alia* includes details of alternative site examination and whether the project requires Clearance under different laws including Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, Coastal Regulation Zone Notification, 2011, if any forest land is involved.

58. It also *inter alia* requires the information with regard to permanent or temporary change in the land use, land cover or topography, including increase in intensity of land use, pre-construction investigations like bore house, soil testing. Underground works, including mining or tunnelling, reclamation works, impoundment, daming, culvating, realignment and other changes to the hydrology of the watercourses or the aquifers, loss of native species or genetic diversity, details of vulnerable groups of people which could be affected by the Project, municipal details of municipal waste, sewage sludge, densely populated or build up areas, environmental sensitivity, information with regard to a risk of accidents during construction or operation of the projects which could affect human health and risk of contamination of land and water from releases of pollutants into ground water or coastal areas are also required to be furnished. The Notification of 2006 further spells out how the Screening, Scoping, Public Consultation and Appraisal are to be carried out by the authorities concerned. Further, the Terms of Reference (for short 'ToR') that are to be prepared on the basis of the information furnished in Form 1 and 1-A would become the very basis for consideration of the project of the Project Proponent. The Notification of 2006 states that ToR are to be conveyed to the Project Proponent by the Expert Appraisal Committee or the SEAC as the case may be, upon which an EIA report is to be submitted after holding public consultation. The nominated agency has to submit its report to the regulatory authority stating whether owing to the local situation and dealing

with the objections raised, in its opinion, the project should be recommended for Environmental Clearance or not. The agency has to further appraise whether the project site is proper or not. This entire process is required to be completed prior to grant of Environmental Clearance. Para 8 of the Notification of 2006 deals with the grant or rejection of 'prior Environmental Clearance'. Authorities are required to deal with the applications for grant of prior Environmental Clearance expeditiously and in any case within the time stipulated under the sub-clauses of Para 8. In terms of Para 8(iii), if the decision of the regulatory authority is not communicated to the Applicant within the period specified in sub-clauses (i) or (ii) of Para 8, the Applicant may proceed as if the Environment Clearance sought for has been granted or denied by the regulatory authority in terms of the final recommendations of the Expert Appraisal Committee or State Level Expert Appraisal Committee, as the case may be. Therefore, the Project Proponent under the Notification of 2006 can commence its construction or activity only after the grant of Environmental Clearance. This Clearance is to be for a specific period, i.e. the validity period. The projects are supposed to be monitored by the authorities even post Environmental Clearance. This is the scheme and requirements of the Notification of 2006 that superseded the Notification of 1994.

59. On 16th November, 2010, the MoEF for the first time issued an Office Memorandum. Since the impugned Office Memoranda, including this Office Memorandum, have a significant bearing on

the matters in issue before us, it will be appropriate to reproduce this Memorandum at this stage:

No. J-11013/41/2006-IA.II(I)

**Government of India
Ministry of Environment & Forests**

Paryavaran Bhavan,
C.G.O Complex, Lodi Road,
New Delhi – 110003
Telefax: 24362434

Dated the 16th November, 2010

Office Memorandum

- Sub:**
- 1. Consideration of proposals involving violation of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 or Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006 / the CRZ Notification, 1991, there under - Regarding.**
 - 2. Corporate Environment Policy - Regarding.**

The Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006 requires all new projects or activities and or expansion and modernization of those existing projects or activities listed in the schedule to the said Notification with capacity beyond the threshold limits prescribed there under, to obtain prior environmental clearance under the provisions thereof.

2. Instances have come to the notice of the Ministry of Environment & Forests where substantial physical progress relating to construction of the project has been made at site and significant investments have been made for setting up of new projects as also for the expansion components of various existing projects such as thermal power plants, integrated steel plants, mining projects etc. without obtaining a requisite prior environmental clearance as is mandated under the EIA Notification, 2006.

3. As per the existing practice being followed in the Ministry for considering such violation cases as and when these are submitted for environmental clearance, while environmental clearance is granted to deserving projects prospectively, based on their merit, in accordance with the recommendation of the Expert Appraisal Committees, simultaneously the concerned State Governments, under the powers delegate to them under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 are requested to initiate action against such units for the period these units have operated in violation of the said Act as per the procedure laid down.

4. The matter has been considered in the Ministry and it has been decided to follow the following procedure henceforth to deal with such cases of violations:

- (i) All such cases of violation which are submitted to the Ministry of Environment & Forests / SEIAAs for environmental clearance would be referred to the respective Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) / SEACs for their consideration based on merit of the proposal. After the EAC / SEAC have made its recommendations on the project, the proposal will be processed on file for obtaining the approval of the Competent Authority.
- (ii) After the Competent Authority has approved the proposal for grant of environmental clearance, MoEF / SEIAA will send a communication to the Project Proponent informing that although the proposal has been approved by the Competent Authority, formal environmental clearance will be issued to the project only after the matter relating to the violations have been put up to the Board of Directors of the Company or to the Managing Committee / CEO of the Society, Trust, partnership / individually owned concern for consideration of its environment related policy / plan of action as also a written commitment in the form of a formal resolution to be submitted to MoEF / SEIAA to ensure that violations of the Environment (Protection) Act etc. will not be repeated. For the purpose, a time limit of 90 days will be given to the Project Proponent. In the mean time, the project will be delisted. In the eventuality of not having any response from the Project Proponent within the prescribed limit of 90 days, it will be presumed that it is no longer interested in pursuing the project further and the project file will be closed, where after the procedure for obtaining environmental clearance will have to be initiated de-novo by such Project Proponents.
- (iii) The respective State Government will be informed of the violation case for their initiating legal action against the Company as per the procedure prescribed.
- (iv) The details of the Project Proponents and a copy of the commitment etc. mentioned at para 4(ii) above will be put on the website of MoEF / SEIAA for information of all / stakeholders.

This issues with the approval of the Competent Authority.

60. In para 2 of the above Office Memorandum, it was noticed that instances have come up to the MoEF where substantial physical progress relating to construction of the project has been made at site and significant investments have been made for setting up of new projects and also for the expansion of the components of various existing projects without obtaining mandated prior Environmental Clearance. Though, this Office Memorandum specifically notices that the Notification of 2006 mandates prior Environmental Clearance, however, the decision was taken that henceforth, all such cases of violation which are submitted to the Ministry would be referred to the EAC/SEAC and depending upon their recommendations, the proposals would be finally dealt with; provided other requirements of the Office Memorandum were satisfied. This Office Memorandum came to be superseded by another Office Memorandum of 12th December, 2012. Again, it was noticed in this Office Memorandum that all projects and activities beyond the threshold limits prescribed thereunder are required to obtain prior Environmental Clearance under the provisions of the Notification of 2006 or Notification of 2011 relating to Coastal Zone Regulation. Again, it noticed that the projects have been started without compliance to these requirements and in some cases, the applications have been pending before the Ministry/the authorities concerned, in terms of the Office Memorandum of 16th November, 2010. The Office Memorandum dated 12th December, 2012 reads as under:

“No. J-11013/41/2006-IAII(I)
Government of India

Ministry of Environment & Forests

Paryavaran Bhavan,
C.G.O Complex, Lodi Road,
New Delhi – 110003

E-mail: pb.rastogi@nic.in

Telefax: 011-24362434

Dated 12th December, 2012

OFFICE MEMORANDUM

Subject: Consideration of proposals for TORs/ Environment Clearance/ CRZ Clearance involving violation of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006/Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification, 2011 - reg.

1. The Environment Impact Assessment Notification (EIA), 2006 and its amendments thereafter require all new projects or activities and / or expansion and modernization of existing projects or activities listed in the schedule to the said Notification with capacity beyond threshold limits prescribed thereunder, to obtain prior Environment Clearance under the provisions thereof. Similarly, CRZ Notification, 2011 imposes certain restrictions on the setting up and expansion of industries, operations or processes and the like in the CRZ.

2. Instances have come to the notice of this Ministry where without obtaining the required clearance under the aforesaid Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2006 and / or CRZ Notification, 2011, the construction / physical operation activities relating to the projects have been started at the sites. Such activities amount to violations under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 / EIA Notification, 2006 CRZ Notification, 2011 (henceforth referred to as violations).

3. The cases for granting Environment Clearance / CRZ Clearance for such projects are at present being dealt with in terms of OM of even number dated 16.11.2010. Now, it has been decided in that in supersession of this OM, the procedure henceforth stated in this OM will be followed while dealing with such cases.

4. The violations could come to the notice of the Ministry at various stages of processing of the proposals, i.e.:

- i. Processing the case in the Ministry before referring the same to the Expert Appraisal

Committee (EAC) for TOR / Environment Clearance / CRZ Clearance;

- ii. During the deliberations in the EAC meeting and recorded as such in the minutes of the meeting; and;
- iii. Processing the case in the Ministry after the receipt of recommendations of the EAC but before granting TOR / Environment Clearance CRZ Clearance.

5. As soon as any case of violation comes/is brought to the notice of the Ministry EAC, the Ministry EAC will proceed to verify the veracity of the complaint through the concerned Regional Office of MoEF/State Government/CZMA. Of course, such a verification will not be required in case the Project Proponent does not contest the allegation of violation. Once the Ministry EAC is satisfied that it is a violation case, before proceeding any further in the matter, the following will need to be ensured in the matter:

- i. The matter relating to the violation will need to be put up by the Project Proponent to the Board of Directors of its Company or to the Managing Committee/CEO of the Society, Trust, partnership /individually owned concern for consideration of its environment related policy/plan of action as also a written commitment in the form of a formal resolution to be submitted to MoEF to ensure that violations will not be repeated. For this purpose, a time limit of 60 days will be given to the Project Proponent. In the meantime, the project will be delisted. In the eventuality of not having any response from the Project Proponent within the prescribed limit of 60 days, it will be presumed that it is no longer interested in pursuing the project further and the project file will be closed, whereafter the procedure will have to be initiated de novo by such Project Proponents.
- ii. The State Government concerned will need to initiate credible action on the violation by invoking powers under Section 19 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 for taking necessary legal action under Section 15 of the Act for the period for which the violation has taken place and evidence provided to MoEF of the credible action taken.
- iii. The details of the Project Proponent and a copy of the commitment, etc., mentioned at (i) above will be put on the website of MoEF for information of all stakeholders.

6. Once action as per para 5 above has been taken, the concerned case will be dealt with and processed as per the prescribed procedure for dealing with cases for

grant of TORs / Environment Clearance CRZ Clearance and appropriate recommendation made by the EAC/decision taken by the Ministry as per the merit of the case.

7. It may be clarified that the consideration of proposals for giving TORs Environment clearance/CRZ clearance for violation cases will not be a matter of right for the Project Proponent. In cases of serious violations, the Ministry reserves the right to outrightly reject such proposals and not consider the same at all.

8. The aforesaid procedure, as stated in para 4 to 7 above will apply *mutatis mutandis* to the cases handled at the State level by the State Environment Impact Assessment Authorities (SEIAAs)/State Level Expert Appraisal Committees (SEACs).

9. This issues with the approval of the competent authority.”

This Office Memorandum deals with situations where violations have been committed by the Project Proponent and they have come to the notice of the MoEF at various stages of construction. It requires the Ministry to verify veracity of the complaint through the concerned regional office and once the Ministry is satisfied that it is a case of violation, then before proceeding any further, the steps contemplated under para 5 to 7 of this Office Memorandum would be taken. The two significant features of this Office Memorandum are that the Project Proponent is to file an undertaking to ensure that violations are not repeated and secondly it will not be a matter of right to the Project Proponent to claim Environmental Clearance and the MoEF can outrightly reject the proposal if it found the violations to be serious. Lastly, that the procedure under para 4 to 7, would apply *mutatis mutandis* to the cases handled by SEIAAs or SEACs. This was considered to be in conformity with the Notification of 2006.

61. Still another Office Memorandum was issued on 27th June, 2013 inserting sub-para 4 in para 5 of the Office Memorandum dated 12th December, 2012 which reads as under:

“3. In view of the above, it has been decided to insert the following as sub-para (iv) below sub-para (iii) of para 5 of the aforesaid OM dated 12.12.2012:

"(iv) Directions under Section 5 of the Environment (Protection) Act 1986 will be issued by MoEF to the Project Proponent in respect of the violations and compliance of Project Proponent obtained to such directions especially with regard to:

(a) In case the project is at construction stage and the violation is on account of carrying out construction without valid EC/CRZ Clearance or in contravention of the conditions stated in the EC/CRZ Clearance, the construction activities will need to be suspended at the existing level till EC/CRZ Clearance is obtained or the required amendment to EC/CRZ Clearance is obtained.

(b) In case the project is in operation and the violation is on account of enhanced production beyond the capacity stated in the EC/CRZ Clearance, the production will need to be restricted to the capacity stated in the EC/CRZ Clearance till EC/CRZ Clearance is obtained for enhanced capacity. In case of operation without a valid EC/CRZ Clearance, the production will need to stop till the required EC/CRZ Clearance is obtained.

(c) In case the violation is on account of carrying out modernization of existing project and/or change in product-mix in an existing manufacturing unit, the status quo as existing prior to such modernization and/or change in product-mix will be maintained till the required EC/CRZ Clearance is obtained for the modernization and/or change in product-mix.

In case of any violation to aforesaid directions, legal action as per the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 will be taken against the Project Proponent and the case of TOR/EC/CRZ Clearance summarily rejected.

This issues with the approval of the competent authority.”

62. Under the terms of Office Memorandum dated 12th December, 2012, the Ministry took upon itself the obligation for issuing

directions under Section 5 of the Act of 1986 in each case, but subject to requirements of the impugned Office Memorandum. It may be noticed that such statutory power is specifically vested in the MoEF and the Office Memorandum could confer upon it no wider powers than the statutorily provided powers.

63. In this background thus, now we have to deal with the question as to in exercise of which power, executive, administrative and / or statutory, the impugned Office Memoranda have been issued by the MoEF?

64. Since the Office Memorandum of 16th November, 2010 stood superseded by the Office Memorandum of 12th December, 2012 which was further amended by the Office Memorandum of 27th June, 2013, the challenge in the present application, is thus, confined to later two Office Memoranda only. A bare reading of the above Office Memoranda clearly shows that the provisions of law under which the said two Office Memoranda have been issued are conspicuous by its very absence in the Office Memoranda. Of course, according to the stand taken by the MoEF, they have been in the exercise of its executive powers. As already noticed, this stand is partially supported by the private Respondents (Project Proponents) who have further added that these Office Memoranda are within the ambit of directions as contemplated under Section 3 and 5 of the Act of 1986. Refuting such contentions, the Applicant has submitted that it is an exercise of administrative power *simplicitor*.

65. There are three organs of the Government: the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. Legislature enacts the laws, judiciary interprets the law and declares what the law is and the executive administers the law. In the present case, we are really not concerned with the scope of legislative and judicial powers. We have to only deal with the ambit and scope of executive or administrative powers exercisable by the Executive, under which the Office Memoranda have been issued. The Executive performs validated functions viz. to investigate, to prosecute, to prepare and to adopt schemes, issues and cancel licences. The Executive can also perform some delegated, legislative functions in relation to making rules, regulations, bylaws and fixation of prices etc. It may still exercise quasi-judicial powers to resolve disputes or fix penalties etc. Such functions have become the chief weapons in its administrative armoury. Functions performed by the Executive authorities can be classified into two different heads but the distinction among these is a very fine one. To state it with precision is very difficult. This distinction gets even finer when it comes to executive and administrative functions *simpliciter*. Even in the same proceedings, it is difficult that one act may be executive while other act or series thereof may be purely administrative yet such classification is essential for varied reasons. When the executive authority exercises quasi-judicial functions, it must follow the principle of natural justice. While this requirement need not be satisfied in the case of executive functions, though, different requirements like publication, laying on the table of the house may

have to be complied with. In case of a pure administrative action, even this would not be necessary. Administrative function can be delegated and administrative decision can be challenged as being unreasonable. Thus, it is proper to determine under what type of function an action is taken by the authorities and in furtherance to exercise of what power. There could be circumstances where even a single function may be partly legislative, partly executive, partly judicial and even partly administrative. This difficulty in construing what kind of function it is, can be overcome by analysing the function and determining its character in each case. For instance, the function of the Wage Board may be held to be legislative if future role of conduct is to be prescribed. It may be held to be judicial if the dispute is as to the relative rights of the parties as they rest on past or present circumstances. But, if there are neither present rights asserted, nor a future rule of conduct prescribed, but merely a fact ascertained, necessary for the practical effectuation of admitted rights, it can be said to be an administrative act (*Australian Boot Trade Employees' Federation v. Whybrow & Co.*, (1910) 10 CLR 266 (317), *Express Newspaper (P) Ltd. v. Union of India*, AIR 1958 SC 578 (6IO)).

66. The legislature enacts the legislation and that which the administration applies is administrative. Another way to look at it is by putting emphasis on the extent and applicability of law. Whereas legislative power is power to make rule for the subjects in general and for their prospective application, administrative power is applicable to such law to specific cases and to particular situations.

Administration again would normally indicate as to how the power should be exercised. Smith in 'Judicial Review of Administrative Action', (1980), states with elaboration the legal consequences that flow from the fundamental distinction between legislative and administrative actions:

1. "If an order is legislative in character, it has to be published in a certain manner, but it is not necessary if it is of an administrative nature.
2. If an order is legislative in character, the court will not issue a writ of certiorari to quash it, but if an order is an administrative order and the authority was required to act judicially, the court can quash it by issuing writ of certiorari.
3. Generally, subordinate legislation cannot be held invalid for unreasonableness, unless its unreasonableness is evidence of malafide or otherwise shows the abuse of power. But in case of unreasonable administrative order, the aggrieved party is entitled to a legal remedy.
4. Only in most exceptional circumstances can legislative power be sub delegated but administrative powers can be sub-delegated
5. Duty to give reasons applies to administrative orders but not to legislative orders."

67. The Supreme Court in the case of *Union of India (UOI) and Anr. v. Cynamide India Ltd. and Anr. etc.*, (1987) 2 SCC 720, summed up this fine distinction between legislative and administrative functions while observing that it was 'difficult in theory and impossible in practice', still, held that a legislative act is the creation and promulgation of a general rule of conduct without reference to particular cases and an administrative act is the making and issuance of a specific direction or the application of a general rule to a particular case in accordance with the requirements of policy'; while questioning that it was a broad distinction, not necessarily always true. Sometimes administration and administrative

adjudication may also be of general application and legislation of particular application only.

68. In the case of *Rai Sahib Ram Jawaya Kapur and Ors. v. The State of Punjab*, AIR 1955 SC, 549, the Court observed that it may not be possible to frame an exhaustive definition of what executive function means and implies. Ordinarily, the executive power connotes the residue of governmental functions that remains after legislative and judicial functions are taken away. Referring to various judgments, Justice C.K. Thakkar in his book 'Administrative Law', 2nd Edition, 2012, refers to the ingredients of administrative functions as follows:

1. "An administrative order is generally based on governmental policy or expediency.
2. In administrative decisions, there is no legal obligation to adopt a judicial approach to the questions to be decided, and decisions are usually subjective rather than objective.
3. An administrative authority is not bound by the rules of evidence and procedure unless the relevant statute specifically imposes such an obligation.
4. An administrative authority can take a decision in exercise of a statutory power or even in the absence of a statutory provision, provided such a decision or act does not contravene provision of law.
5. Administrative functions may be delegated and sub-delegated unless there is a specific bar or prohibition in the statute.
6. While taking a decision, an administrative authority may not only consider the evidence adduced by the parties to the dispute, but may also use its discretion.
7. An administrative authority is not always bound by the principles of natural justice unless the statute casts such duty on the authority, either expressly or by necessary implication or if it is required to act judicially.
8. An administrative order may be held to be invalid on ground of unreasonableness.
9. An administrative action will not become a quasi-judicial action merely because it has to be

performed after forming an opinion as to the existence of an objective fact.

10. The prerogative writ of certiorari and prohibition are not always available against administrative actions.”

69. In the case of *Automotive Tyre Manufacturers Association v. The Designated Authority and Ors.*, (2011) 2 SCC 258, the Supreme Court elucidated the factors for determining whether the function was administrative, quasi-judicial or otherwise. These factors are: the nature of the power conferred, the person or persons on whom it is conferred, the framework of the law conferring that power, the consequences ensuing from the exercise of that power and the manner in which that power is expected to be exercised. Besides this, it is a generally accepted principle of functioning of administrative authorities that guidelines should be provided for the rust exercise thereof and to prevent abuse of power and to ensure that it does not become a “new despotism”. Various judgments of the Supreme Court, after enunciating the principles that control the application of these concepts, illustratively stated the cases of administrative function. For instances an order of preventive detention, an order setting up a Commission of enquiry, an order making or refusing to make a reference under the Industrial Dispute Act, 1947, an order granting or refusing sanction to prosecute public servant, an order of externment, power to issue licence or permit or even withdrawal from prosecution. Having examined the dimensions of the administrative actions of the State, now we will revert to the executive powers of the State. Subject to the provisions of the Constitution, the executive power of the Union

extends to all matters in respect to which the Parliament has power to make laws, while the executive powers of the State extends to all matters in respect to which the State Legislature has power to make laws. This executive power of the Union or of the State, broadly speaking, is co-extensive and co-terminus with its respective legislative power (*G.V. Ramanaiah vs. The Superintendent of Central Jail, Rajahmundry and Ors.*, (1974) 3SCC 531). Ordinarily, the executive power connotes the residue of Governmental functions that remain after legislative and judicial functions are taken away. The executive functions comprises both determination of policy as well as carrying it into execution (Wharton's Law Lexicon, 15th Edition, 2009). Since the governmental functions have increased, it is essential and inevitable for the Government to issue administrative instructions for the determination of policy and its uniform application. It is also a settled principle that these administrative instructions or regulations which have no statutory force, do not give rise to any legal right and can hardly be enforced in a Court of law against the administration. This is also not an absolute rule and is subject to certain exceptions. Administrative instructions in some cases confer a justifiable right in favour of an aggrieved party. The Executive power of the State is again of a very wide magnitude. In performance of the executive functions, public authorities issue orders which are not far from having a legislative colour and make decisions affecting the personal and proprietary rights of individuals which are quasi-judicial in character. In addition to these quasi-judicial and quasi-legislative functions, the

executive has also been empowered by statute to exercise functions which are legislative and judicial in character, and in certain instances, powers are exercised which appear to partake at the same moment legislative, executive and judicial characteristics. The Supreme Court in the case of *Jayantilal Amritlal v. F.N.Rana*, AIR 1964 SC 648, held that even this generic executive power of the State emanates from the provisions under our Constitution. Chapter I of Part V of the Constitution refers itself to the Executive of the Union of India. Article 53(1) of the Constitution states that executive power of the Union shall be vested in the President and shall be exercised by him either directly or through officers subordinate to him in accordance with this Constitution. Article 73 mandates that subject to the provisions of the Constitution, the executive power of the Union shall extend to the matters with respect to which Parliament has power to make laws and to the exercise of such rights, authority and jurisdiction as are exercisable by the Government of India by virtue of any treaty or agreement. In terms of Article 77, all executive action of the Government of India shall be expressed to be taken in the name of the President. Further, Orders and other instruments made and executed in the name of the President shall be authenticated in such manner as may be specified in Rules. Once an order or instrument is authenticated in the prescribed manner, then it shall not be called in question on the ground that it is not an order or instrument made or executed by the President. The executive power of the State on the one hand is co-extensive with the respective legislative

power, while, it can supplement the statute on the other hand. The executive power would take within its ambit the power of subordinate or delegated legislation. For instance, under an Act, the Central Government is empowered to frame regulations for effective implementation of an Act. This power can be exercised to supplement the provisions of the Act, i.e., the principle legislation or even for filling the gaps which appear in the main statute. However, the executive instructions or powers cannot be used beyond the power conferred by the main statute. The exercise of an executive power must have a source in law and should serve the ends of the principle Act. The executive power, where it is exercised generally with reference to Article 53 of the Constitution of India, must adhere to the constitutionally prescribed procedure.

70. Having dealt with the distinction between Legislative, Executive and Administrative Functions, generally, now, we would proceed to examine the specific contentions with reference to the impugned Office Memoranda.

71. First of all, we would deal with the contention whether the impugned Office Memoranda can be said to be issued under Section 5 of the Act of 1986? This question has to be answered in the negative for varied reasons. Firstly, it is not the case of the MoEF which has issued these Office Memoranda that they have been issued in exercise of the statutory powers vested in them under the provisions of Section 5 of the Act of 1986. Normally it is possible for a Court or a Tribunal to attach certain weightage to the author of the documentation in this regard. However, that cannot be the sole

consideration in answering such a question. The Tribunal has to analyse the order or document on its own merit. It is true that Section 3 empowers the Central Government to take measures to protect and improve the quality of the environment and that such measures can be in respect of all or any of the matters stated under Clause (i) to (xiv) of Sub-section (2) of Section 3 of the Act of 1986. However, none of the matters stated therein cover the impugned Office Memoranda in question. Furthermore, these Office Memoranda cannot be said to form the measures taken for protecting or improving the quality of the environment. Similarly, Section 5 of the Act of 1986 empowers the Central Government to issue directions to any person, officer or any authority. Such directions could be issued in exercise of its powers, performance of its functions of the Central Government notwithstanding anything contained in any other law but subject to the provisions of this Act of 1986. These directions include the power to direct the closure, prohibition or regulation of any industry, operation or process. It can also direct stoppage or regulation of the supply of electricity or water or any other service. Under Rule 4 of the Rules of 1986, it is required that these directions shall be in writing, shall specify the nature of action to be taken and the time within which it shall be complied with etc. In terms of Sub-rule 3(a) of Rule 4, a notice of not less than 15 days is required to be served upon the person to whom the directions is proposed to be issued, clearly notifying such direction to him and giving him an opportunity to file objections, if any. In terms of Sub-Rule 3(b) and 4, it is required of the authority

which proposes to issue direction for the stoppage or regulation of industrial operation or process or disconnect amenities like water and electricity etc. to issue notice to the occupier to file objections and upon receipt of such objections to decide the same within 45 days thereof. Thus, right of hearing and compliance to principle of natural justice is mandatory except in terms of proviso to Sub-Rule 3(b) and Rule 5 wherein compliance to the principle of natural justice and hearing can be dispensed with by the Central Government, where it is of the opinion that there is likelihood of grave injury to the environment and it is not expedient to provide an opportunity to file objections against the proposed direction. The directions passed under Section 5 have to be in strict compliance to the procedure laid down under the Rules of 1986 and by considering all relevant factors as stated therein. It is nobody's case, not even that of the private Respondents, that such compliance to the Rules has been made by the MoEF. The measures and the directions as contemplated under the Act of 1986 can only be taken after following the prescribed procedure and for the purposes as contemplated in law. From the record, it is clear that neither of these ingredients are satisfied in the cases in hand. Nobody intended to invoke these provisions and none complied with the requirements of law. A bare reading of the impugned Office Memoranda clearly shows that they are beyond the purview and scope of either Section 3 or Section 5 of the Act of 1986. Some of the Respondents have even taken the argument that if the Office Memoranda are treated to be directions or measures issued under

Section 5 of the Act of 1986, then an appeal would lie before the Tribunal in terms of Section 16(g) of the NGT Act, 2010 and which would in any case be barred by time as of today. Since we are of the considered view that these Office Memoranda have not been issued by the Ministry in exercise of its powers under Section 3 or 5 of the Act of 1986, the question of limitation as contemplated under Section 16 of the NGT Act would not at all arise. These Office Memoranda apparently do not show or make reference to the power in exercise of which they have been issued. They specifically mention the statutory requirement in terms of the Notification of 2006 to obtain *prior Environmental Clearance* before the commencement of any project or activity (emphasis supplied). What seems to have provoked the authorities to issue these Office Memoranda from time to time are the instances which have been brought to the notice of the Ministry, where, without obtaining required Clearances under the Notification of 2006, construction and/or physical operation/activities of the project had been started at the sites which amount to violation of the Act of 1986 and the Notification of 2006. These violations have come to the notice of the Ministry at different stages. These Office Memoranda presumably are intended to provide solution to this problem and save the proposed projects if they comply with the procedure prescribed under the Law. Rules of 1986 have been framed by the Central Government in exercise of its powers vested under Sections 6 and 25 of the Act of 1986 with a primary intention of carrying out purpose of the Act of 1986. The Notification of 2006 has been

issued under the provisions of the Act of 1986 and the Rules of 1986, again with the object of imposing certain restrictions and prohibitions on new projects or activities or expansion or modernisation of existing projects or activities for protecting the environment. Thus, it is evident that the Notification of 2006 is in the nature of a subordinate, delegated legislation and is a statutory document having the force of law and is enacted to serve the ends of the provisions of a Parliamentary enactment i.e. the Act of 1986. The Office Memoranda do not refer to the source of their power under the provisions of any Act, Rules, or Notification. They even do not satisfy the basic ingredients of an order or instrument having been issued in compliance to the prescribed procedure under Articles 53, 73 and / or 77 of the Constitution. They have neither been issued nor authenticated by a person authorized by the President of India and in any case, they have not even been issued in the name of the President of India. The contention raised on behalf of MoEF and some of the private Respondents that the issuance of impugned Office Memoranda is in exercise of the executive power, is therefore, not tenable. No documents have been placed on record to show that the ingredients of issuance of an executive order or exercise of executive power by the Union are satisfied in the present case.

72. It needs to be noticed at this stage that reference has also been made to Article 73 of the Constitution of India to contend that these Office Memoranda squarely fall within the executive power of the Union of India. This contention merits rejection. Even on the

bare reading of Article 73 of the Constitution, the executive power of the Union shall extend to the matters with respect to which Parliament has power to make laws. The executive powers of the Union is co-extensive and co-terminus with legislative powers of the Parliament. In other words, exercise of executive power should have a direct reference to law under which it is being exercised. Certainly, it does not imply that the executive power of the State / Union cannot be exercised where the legislature has not enacted any law or that such power would be restricted only to that field, as held by the Supreme Court in the case of *Ram Jawaya Kapur* (supra). It is a settled principle of Constitutional jurisprudence that the entries in the Lists are merely fields of legislation. They identify the fields where the Union and the State Legislature or either of them would have the power to enact laws, individually or concurrently. Thus, every power exercisable by the Union or the State under the Constitution should be identifiable to the fields specified in the respective Lists or to any other law framed by the Competent Legislature.

73. We have already noticed that within the dimensions of the executive power, compliance to the constitutionally provided procedure would be a *sine qua non*, for it to have the force of law. In the case of *Gulf Goans Hotels Company Ltd. v. Union of India (UOI)*, (2014) 10 SCC 673, where the Supreme Court was dealing with the cases of demolition of properties in furtherance to the orders of demolition by the State authorities, it was held that a government policy to acquire the “force of law”, need to confirm to a certain form

possessed by other laws in force and encapsulate a mandate and disclose a specific purpose. In terms of Article 77, all executive action of the Government of India shall be expressed to be taken in the name of the President, as this Article provides the form in which the Executive must make and authenticate its orders and decision. The burden of showing compliance with this requirement would be on the Government and it is also essential that what is claimed to be a law must be notified or made public in order to bind the citizens. It may be noticed that this compliance in a given case could be substantial compliance as opposed to strict or absolute compliance. In fact, in the case of *State of Uttaranchal and Anr. v. Sunil Kumar Vaish and Ors.*, (2011) 8 SCC 670, the Supreme Court even held that unless an order is expressed in the name of the President or the Governor and is authenticated in the manner prescribed by the Rules, the same cannot be treated as an order on behalf of the Government. Similar approach was also adopted in the case of *Shanti Sports Club and Anr. v. Union of India and Ors.*, AIR 2010 SC 433. The Supreme Court had earlier also taken the similar view in the case of *Harla v. The State of Rajasthan*, AIR 1951 SC 467,

“We hold that, in the absence of some specific law or custom to the contrary, a mere resolution of a Council of Ministers in the Jaipur State without further publication or promulgation would not be sufficient to make a law operative”.

On the one hand, the impugned Office Memoranda do not specify the above essential ingredients for exercise of executive power. Thus, these Office Memoranda do not have any force of law

to be treated as integral part of the Notification of 2006. While on the other hand, they lack purpose, are not supplementary to or even furthering the cause of the Notification of 2006. This aspect we shall discuss in detail shortly.

74. We have deliberated at some length above what is an administrative action and its illustrations. That which the legislature enacts is 'legislative' and that which the administration applies is 'administrative'. Thus, an Act of Parliament is 'legislative' but an order of deportation based on such Act is 'administrative'. An administrative power is applicable to specific cases and particular situations. The executive functions comprise both, determination of policy as well as carrying it into execution. The other relevant considerations being, nature of power conferred, the person or persons on whom it is conferred, the framework of the law conferring that power, the consequences ensuing from the exercise of that power and the manner in which that power is expected to be exercised. If we apply these tests in context of the orders already held to be administrative orders (supra) then, it would appear that the impugned Office Memoranda in substance are administrative orders. The impugned Office Memoranda have been issued under the umbrella of framing policy or taking policy decisions by the State. It is contended that these Office Memoranda are intended to implement the Notification of 2006. In exercise of its power under the Office Memoranda, Ministry has to take decisions in regard to examining each case and refer the same to the regulatory authority keeping in mind the stage at which the

applications for grant of Environmental Clearance are moved. These Office Memoranda provide benefit to the class of the project or activity owners who have started construction in violation of the law i.e., without obtaining prior Environmental Clearance. They do not deal with any subject in general but are applicable to specific case and particular situations. Decisions of the authorities in furtherance to these Office Memoranda are bound to be subjective in contradistinction to being objective decisions.

75. The impugned Office Memoranda by and large satisfy the tests and ingredients of an administrative order. They admittedly have not been issued in exercise of subordinate or delegated legislation. Indisputably, they have also not been issued under Sections 3 and 5 of the Act of the 1986. Apparently, they are not in compliance with the Constitutional requirements and other ingredients of exercise of executive power *simplicitor*. The obvious result thereto would be that these Office Memoranda have been issued by the Ministry in exercise of its administrative power and have to be construed as administrative orders alone.

76. Having held that the Office Memoranda are orders issued by the Ministry in exercise of its administrative powers *simplicitor*, we would now proceed to examine the legality and correctness of these administrative orders. We may clarify that for discussion on this issue, it would not be of much relevance whether these Office Memoranda have been issued by the authorities in exercise of their administrative or executive powers.

77. The Office Memorandum dated 12th December, 2012 and as amended by Office Memorandum dated 27th June, 2013 as already noticed have been issued as consequences of certain instances brought to the notice of the Ministry, that projects and activities have been started at site without obtaining prior Environmental Clearance. These Office Memoranda intend to provide the procedure which has to be followed while dealing with such cases. In these Memoranda it is specifically noticed that obtaining prior Environmental Clearance before commencement of a project or activities is mandatory and that the Applicants have violated the law and these violations have come to the notice of the Ministry at various stages of processing the proposals. They further contemplate that these applications have to be proceeded in accordance with the procedure prescribed under these Office Memoranda. The stages referred to in the impugned Office Memoranda are: processing the case in the Ministry before referring to the Expert Appraisal Committee for ToR/Environmental Clearance/CRZ Clearance; during deliberations in the EAC meeting and during processing the case in the Ministry after receipt of the recommendations of the EAC, but before granting ToR/Environmental Clearance / CRZ Clearance. The authorities are expected to verify the veracity of the complaint unless Project Proponent does not contest the allegations of violations. Before proceeding any further in the matter, the Project Proponent is required to submit a written commitment in the form of a resolution to ensure that violations will not be repeated. For this purpose, 60

days time limit has been given to the Project Proponent. The project would be de-listed in the meantime and in the event of default, it will be presumed that the Project Proponent is no longer interested in pursuing the project further and the project file will be closed. The State Government will then be required to initiate credible action under Section 19 of the Act of 1986 for taking legal action under Section 15 of the Act of 1986 in relation to the violations. Upon completion of such action, the concerned case will be dealt and proceeded with as per the prescribed procedure in dealing with the cases of ToR / Environmental Clearance / CRZ Clearance and appropriate recommendations to be made by EAC and decision to be taken by the Ministry on merits of the case. A kind of proviso is added to the Office Memorandum of 12th December, 2012 that in case of serious violations, the Ministry reserves the right to outrightly reject such proposal and not consider the same at all. The procedure prescribed under the Office Memorandum of 12th December, 2012 is to apply to cases pending before the SEIAAs and SEACs as well. Office Memorandum dated 27th June, 2013 terms the procedure under the Office Memorandum of 12th December, 2012 as 'guidelines' wherein it was provided that in cases of violation, the Project Proponent needs to be restrained, through appropriate directions under Section 5 of the Act of 1986 from carrying out any construction or operation activity without obtaining required Clearance. Vide the Office Memorandum of 27th June, 2013, sub para (iv) below sub para (iii) of para 5 of Office Memorandum dated 12th December, 2012, was inserted whereby

the MoEF took on to itself the responsibility of issuing directions under Section 5 of the Act of 1986 for suspending the construction work if the project is operational, till grant of Clearance and if there is violation then, to take action as per the provisions of the Act of 1986. First and foremost, what these Office Memoranda seek to do is to condone the violations of law. These Office Memoranda deal only with the violators of law who have started the construction of their projects without obtaining prior Environmental Clearance, thus, in complete violation to the provisions of Act of 1986 and the Notification of 2006. The Office Memoranda which are stated to be guidelines as per their contents thus, have the effect of rendering an offence under law otiose, which is impermissible.

78. The Notification of 2006, under Para 2 mandates that certain project or activities which are listed in the Schedule shall require *prior Environmental Clearance* (emphasis supplied) from the concerned regulatory authorities, irrespective of whether they fall under Category 'A' or category 'B', as the case may be. Furthermore, Para 6 requires that *application seeking prior Environmental Clearance shall be made by the Project Proponent*, before commencing any construction activity or preparation of the land at the site by the Applicant (emphasis supplied). The Notification of 2006, a statutory document having the force of law has used the words '*prior Environmental Clearance*' 34 times and in addition thereto the expression 'prior' has been used six times to emphasise the need for obtaining Environmental Clearance prior to the commencement of any project activity. In other words, the

Notification mandates the requirement of 'prior Environmental Clearance' without exception. However the entire mandate of prior Environmental Clearance has not only been diluted but completely rendered infructuous or ineffective by issuance of these impugned Office Memoranda. Therefore, the Office Memoranda stated to be 'guidelines', are potently destructive of the Notification of 2006. The Notification of 2006 requires application for prior Environmental Clearance to be submitted in Form 1 and supplementary Form 1A, if applicable, under Appendix I and II respectively. These forms require information, details and scientific analysis in relation to the project and site, prior to commencement of any activity of the project or even preparation of land. We have in some detail above, noticed the requirements which are impossible of compliance once the project has been completed or substantial construction activity has been undertaken at the site in question. The impugned Office Memoranda do not even take note of this aspect and suffer from the infirmity of non-application of mind. Furthermore, the impugned Office Memoranda also offend the doctrine of "*Expressio unius est exclusio alterius*". Since the law provides performance of acts in a particular manner, the impugned Office Memoranda under the garb of 'guidelines', cannot be permitted to alter the same completely; being prejudicial to the principal law.

79. The impugned Office Memoranda do not even advert themselves to how the interest of the environment would be protected in cases where the projects have substantially progressed. It does not even refer as to how detrimental effects on environment

would be taken care of, if the Project Proponent is permitted to file an application and claim Environmental Clearance after the project is at a very advanced stage of completion.

80. The impugned orders have been titled as 'Office Memorandum' and content of the orders captioned as 'guidelines' but in fact, are Office Memoranda which directly vary the substantive law in force. This has been adopted by the Ministry as a via-media to bypass the statutory requirements of law or for truncating the prescribed process of environmental protection, in terms of Notification of 2006. These Office Memoranda not only substantially amend or alter its application but even frustrate the requirements of the existing law. The impugned Office Memoranda vest in the authorities an unguided and unfettered discretion, both in regard to processing of application and in condonation of violation already committed by the Project Proponent. It is a very pertinent defect in terms of administrative law jurisprudence. An unguided and unreasonable discretion is bound to result in arbitrary exercise of powers. The MoEF being the controlling Ministry, all the expert bodies under it would be duty bound to carry out its directives even if it is unreasonable and unjustifiable. The expression 'serious violations', which will entitle the Ministry to outrightly reject an application, has neither been defined nor explained in the Office Memoranda. It is left in the absolute discretion of the Ministry as to which cases would be permitted as cases of serious violations and exclude others. The foundation of these Office Memoranda being that projects which are already under way and even have

substantially progressed, can file an application for grant of Environmental Clearance, which has to be considered in accordance with these Office Memoranda, is an approach which is completely prohibited in terms of the Notification of 2006. The reservation of such unguided and absolute right by the Ministry in itself would necessarily have an element of discrimination and arbitrariness. The Office Memoranda do not spell out any rational or proper differential criteria for condonation or otherwise of the violations stated to have been committed by the Project Proponent.

81. The MoEF has issued three Office Memoranda dated 16th November, 2010, 12th December, 2012 and 27th June, 2013. All these Office Memoranda have the same feature, that is, instances of project commencement and their construction without obtaining Environmental Clearance, have been brought to the notice of the Ministry. There is no reason, much less a plausible justification recorded in any of these Office Memoranda, as to why such violations have been continued year after year. If the intention was to make it a one-time settlement, to serve the economic and public interest, then MoEF ought not to have issued any further extension to the Office Memorandum of 2010. Repetitive condonation of violation of law would only aim at encouraging violators to flout the law repeatedly. At this stage, we may also deal with the submission made on behalf of the Respondents that issuance of these Office Memoranda was justifiable on the basis of the doctrine of necessity or implied power. This submission is entirely ill-founded. Firstly, we fail to understand as to why the Ministry should take a step for

condoning violation of law which was not within its jurisdiction and secondly why should it prescribe a methodology contrary to law. Doctrine of necessity does not operate on the axis of illegality and violations. Even if the doctrine of necessity could have any application on the facts of the present case then, the necessity could be at best a onetime scheme rather than providing a regulatory and parallel mechanism in violation of the law in force, which would negate the substantive provisions of the law in fact. It is a settled canon of law that Government cannot issue directions which would encourage violation of law on the one hand and frustrate the object of law on the other. Mandatory principle of proper governance and even the law is that the authorities must enforce the law and ensure that the public respects the law. This is the fundamental essence of the Rule of Law. Even on this count, the Office Memoranda would amount to improper use of power, whether administrative or executive.

82. Upon proper analysis of the language of these Office Memoranda and the law (referred herein after), these Office Memoranda whether they be issued as administrative orders or issued in exercise of executive power, are not clarificatory or supplementary to the Notification of 2006. On the contrary, under no uncertain terms, they are supplanting the Notification of 2006 and are in complete derogation to the laws in force.

83. The Office Memoranda have been issued without proper application of mind, where casualty is the Notification of 2006 and the environment. The authorities have not even ventured to

examine that these Office Memoranda which allegedly take recourse to the Notification of 2006 are incapable of complying with the procedure of Screening, Scoping, Public Consultation and Appraisal even substantially. For instance, site selection itself is a part of this process and if the construction has already been completed substantially or otherwise, this criteria and other relevant considerations would be rendered irrelevant. Similarly the purpose of public hearing is to hear objections of the public at large in relation to all facets of the proposed project including site selection, its impact on environment, on their way of life and what directions are required to be issued to protect the environment and adjacent inhabitation or agricultural activities if any before any activity of the project is undertaken. All these requirements would be rendered otiose and irrelevant. Thus, even if the two most important aspects of the Notification of 2006 would not be complied with still the Office Memoranda would contemplate issuance of Environmental Clearance to these projects. This brings to the surface that the Ministry has not exercised its jurisdiction, even if vested in it, in accordance with law. The above are the few patent and serious infirmities in the Office Memoranda. An attempt is made to save them and their legality under the shelter of exercise of executive power. Certainly, the executive power of the Government is very wide. We have already dealt with the executive power by the State at some length above. Even if these instructions or orders are deemed to have been issued in exercise of executive power, even then, they have to be supplemental to and not to supplant, the law.

84. In the case of *Union of India (UOI) v. K.P. Joseph and Ors.*, AIR 1978 SC 303, dealing with the question whether Respondent No. 1 in that case was entitled to the benefit of ex-military personnel on re-employment, in view of the administrative instructions that had been issued in absence of rules framed under Article 309 of the Constitution, the Supreme Court while confirming the judgment of the High Court of Mysore held as under:

“9. Generally speaking, an administrative Order confers no justiciable right, but this rule, like all other general rules, is subject to exceptions. This Court has held in *Sant Ram Sharma v. State of Rajasthan and Anr.* (1968) IILLJ 830 SC that although Government cannot supersede statutory rules by administrative instructions, yet, if the rules framed under Article 309 of the Constitution are silent on any particular point, the Government can fill up gaps and supplement the rules and issue instructions not inconsistent with the rules already framed and these instructions will govern the conditions of service.”

85. The Supreme Court had also taken a similar view in the case of *Sant Ram Sharma v. State of Rajasthan and Anr.*, AIR 1967 SC 1910, where the Court clearly held that Government cannot amend or supersede statutory rules by administrative instructions, but, if the rules are silent on any particular point, the Government can fill up the gaps and supplement the rules and issue instructions not inconsistent with the rules already framed. Similarly, in the case of *M. Srinivasa Prasad and Ors. v. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India and Ors.*, (2007)10 SCC 246, the Supreme Court held that if the statutory rules in force are absent or are silent on a particular aspect, then, executive orders can fill up such lacunas. The administrative instructions would normally have no force of law

and would relate to matters procedural in nature, without affecting substantive rights or obligations.

86. The executive instructions too cannot go beyond the executive power, which can also not be beyond the statutory provisions under which they are exercised. Furthermore, such instructions should not be vague or uncertain and must provide proper guidelines. By executive instructions, the authority issuing them cannot open new heads. The executive instructions within these confines should be issued only when there are no statutory provisions on the subject. They would also be issued to supplement statutory provisions, to ensure their proper application. In the case of *Indra Sawhney etc. v. Union of India and others, etc.*, (1992) 3 SCC 217, Supreme Court mandated that such propositions are unexceptionable and executive instructions which go contrary to statutory provisions or the rules under Article 309 or any other statutory rules, shall not be operative to the extent they are contrary to the statutory provisions or rules. In the case of *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India (UOI) and Ors.*, (*Supra*), not only that the Court reiterated these principles but even questioned MoEF's intent to legalise the commencement or continuance of mining activity without compliance to the stipulations of the Notification of 2006. However, it was observed that in any case, a statutory notification cannot be notified by issuance of circular. Such actions demonstrate non-sensitivity of MoEF to the principles of sustainable development and the object behind the issuance of the notification.

These principles would be equally applicable to the exercise of administrative power either by issuance of guidelines or Office Memoranda. A Bench of this Tribunal while dealing somewhat similar situation in the case of *Himmat Singh Shekhawat v. State of Rajasthan and Ors.*, 2015 All (I) NGT Reporter (1) (Delhi) 44 held as under:

“58. This power to issue guidelines is not a general power but is a specific power with inbuilt limitations. The limitations are that, such guidelines would alone be for the purposes of categorizing upon scrutiny of applications, projects that would fall under Category ‘B1’ and ‘B2’ respectively with specific exclusion of the projects specified under Item 8(b) of the Schedule. Restrictive power to issue guidelines, is further illustrated, by the fact that Clause 2 of the Notification of 2006 does not contemplate any such categorization except projects falling under Category ‘A’ and ‘B’ only. The purpose appears to be that the power of State Level Appraisal Committees to bifurcate projects into ‘B1’ and ‘B2’ categories respectively should not be unguided and unchecked. Prescription of such guidelines could be done by issuance of appropriate Office Memorandum or orders as the power to issue such guidelines has been vested in MoEF under the statutory provisions. But the greater part of such Office Order or Office Memorandum should be such that it would not vary the content or be contrary to the statutory provisions which are in place by virtue of enacting such provisions either by primarily legislative or delegated legislative power.

59. It is a settled principle that legislature can only delegate to an outside body subordinate or ancillary legislative power for carrying out a policy of the act. The body to whom such power is delegated is required to act strictly within the framework of such delegated powers. Such power is incidental to the exercise of all powers in as much as it is necessary to delegate for the proper discharge of all the public duties. It is because the body constituted should act in the manner indicated in law and should exercise its discretion by following the procedure therein itself or by such delegation as is permissible. Unlike the situation the judges are not allowed to surrender their judgments to others. The legislature and executive can delegate powers within the framework of law. It is an axiom of Constitutional law that representative legislative bodies

are given the legislative powers because the representative Government vested in the persons chosen to exercise the power of voting taxes and enacting laws which is the most important and sacred trust known to civil Government. The Delegation has its own restrictions. For instance, the legislature cannot delegate its functions of laying down legislative policy in respect of a measure and its formulation as a rule of conduct. A memorandum which is nothing but administrative order or instruction cannot amend or supersede the Statutory Rules adding something therein which would specifically alter the content and character of the Notification itself. It has been consistently reiterated with approval by the Hon'ble Supreme Court that administrative practice/ administrative order cannot supersede or override the statutory rule of Notification and it is stated to be a well settled proposition of law.

The delegated power is primarily for carrying out the purposes of the Act and this power could hardly be exercised to bring into existence a substantive right or obligation or disabilities not contemplated by the provisions of the Act or the primary Notification. A Constitution Bench of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of *Sant Ram v. State of Rajasthan* AIR 1965 SC 1910, while dealing with the scope of executive instructions held that instructions can be issued only to supplement the statutory rules and not to supplant it. Such instructions should be subservient to the statutory provisions. They would have a binding effect provided the same has been issued to fill up the gaps between the statutory provisions and are not inconsistent with the said provisions. (Reference in regard to the above can be made *In Re: The Delhi Laws Act, 1912* AIR 1951 SC 332, *P.D. Aggarwal and Ors. v. State of U.P. and Ors.*, (1987) 3 SCC 622, *Ram Sharma v. State of Rajasthan and Anr.*, (1968) 1 ILLJ 830 SC, *Mahender Lal Jaine v. State of Uttar Pradesh*, (1963) Supp. 1 SCR 912, *Naga People's Movement of Human Rights v. Union of India*, AIR 1998 SC 431).

60. In the case before the Tribunal, specific challenge has been raised to the Office Memorandum dated 24th December, 2013 on the ground that it violates the above stated principles, in as much as by an Office Memorandum, guidelines for 'B1', 'B2' categories cannot be provided and thus, it runs contra to the statutory provisions. We may also notice here that vide this memorandum, besides providing guidelines for categorization of 'B1', 'B2' projects under Clause (iii) of paragraph 2, MoEF has taken a decision that river sand mining project with mine lease area of less than 5 hectares may not be considered for grant of

Environmental Clearance and river sand mining projects with mining lease areas of equal or more than 5 hectares but less than 25 hectares will be categorized 'B2', that too subject to the restrictions stated in that Office Memorandum. Though, the Applicants have primarily raised a challenge in regard to the former only, but bare reading of the Notification has brought before us the question in regard to the latter as well. Dealing with the former challenge afore-noticed, it is clear that Clause 7 of the Notification of 2006 provides for further categorization of projects falling under Category 'B' into 'B1' and 'B2'. Though Clause 2 of the said Notification does not contemplate any classification other than 'A' and 'B', but, there is no challenge raised before us to the Notification of 2006 and we see no reason to go into that aspect. The Notification of 2006 *ex facie* permits classification of Category 'B' projects and that discretion has been vested in State Level Expert Appraisal Committee, which, upon scrutiny of the applications has to take the decision. This discretion vested in the Committee is ought to be controlled by the issuance of guidelines by MoEF. MoEF had issued two guidelines, one on 24th June, 2013 and the other on 24th December, 2013 in relation to further classification and criteria which is to be adopted in that regard. Since the Office Memorandum dated 24th June, 2013, only relates to brick earth and ordinary earth and as per that Office Memorandum, such projects where the excavation area was less than 5 hectares were to be categorized as 'B2' projects, subject to the guidelines stated therein they were to be screened in accordance with the Notification of 2006. Under Paragraph 4(b) of this Memorandum, restrictions were laid down prohibiting any excavation of brick earth or ordinary earth within one km of national parks and wild life sanctuaries as well as it intended to elaborate the cluster situation. If the periphery of one borrow area is less than 500 m from the periphery of another borrow area and the total borrow area equals or exceeds 5 hectares, the activity shall become Category 'B1' project in terms of the Notification of 2006 and such activity will be permitted only if the Environmental Clearance has been obtained in respect of the cluster. If we examine these two Office Memoranda in the light of the well settled legal principles that we have referred above, partially both these Office Memoranda cannot stand scrutiny of law. As far as guidelines or instructions in relation to classification of projects falling under Category 'B' into 'B1' and 'B2' is concerned, the exercise of such power would be saved on the strength of Clause 7(1) of the Notification of 2006 because it is an Office

Memorandum which provides guidelines for exercise of discretion by the State Level Expert Committee for such categorization. Thus, it is an exercise of executive power contemplated under the Notification of 2006. Hence the contention of the Applicant on that behalf cannot be accepted and deserves to be rejected. However, in so far as the Office Memorandum dated 24th June, 2013 placing a prohibition under paragraph 4(b) (i) is concerned, it apparently is beyond the scope of such guidelines. Prohibition of carrying on of mining activity or excavation activity which is otherwise permitted by the Notification of 2006 cannot be done by an Office Order, because it would apparently run contra to the provisions of Notification of 2006. In other words, such restriction is not only beyond the scope of the power vested in MoEF but in fact imposition of absolute restriction in exercise of delegated power is not permissible. Similarly, the Office Memorandum dated 24th December, 2013 in so far as it declares that river sand mining of a lease area of less than 5 hectares would not be considered for grant of Environmental Clearance is again violative of the above settled principles. No such restriction has been placed under the Notification of 2006 or under the provisions of the Act and the Rules of 1986. The executive therefore, cannot take away the right which is impermissible under the principle of subordinate legislation. Of course, part of the same Paragraph 2(iii), in so far as it categorizes 'B2' projects, covering the mine lease area equal to or more than 5 hectares but less than 25 hectares is concerned, the same cannot be faulted in view of the fact that it only provides a criteria or a guiding factor for determining the categorization of projects. It neither vests any substantive right, nor any obligation in relation to any matter that is not squarely or effectively covered under the Notification. This only furthers the cause of fair classification of projects, which is the primary purpose of the Notification. For these reasons, we quash paragraph 4(b)(i) of the Office Memorandum dated 24th June 2013 and part of paragraph 2(iii) in so far as it prohibits grant of Environmental Clearance to the mine area of less than 5 hectares as being violative of the Notification of 2006 and the Rules of 1986. The MoEF has no jurisdiction in exercise of its executive power to issue such prohibitions, impose restrictions and/or create substantive rights and obligations. It *ex facie* is not only in excess of powers conferred upon them, but, is also in violation of the Notification of 2006. As already noticed, this Notification has been issued by MoEF in exercise of powers conferred upon it under Clause 5 of sub section 2 of section 3 of the Act of 1986 read with

sub rule 4 of rule 5 of the Rules of 1986. Vide this Notification, the Central Government substituted item no. 1(a) and entries relating thereto. A Clause stating that the projects relating to non-coal mine lease and where the mining area was less than 50 hectares equal or more than 5 hectares was to be treated as Category 'B' projects, in addition to that, the minor mineral lease projects, where the mine lease area was less than 50 hectares, were also to be treated as Category 'B' projects, also, the general conditions with provisos were also substituted. It is significant to note here that the Notification of 2006 had been amended by the Central Government by issuing a Notification dated 1st December, 2009 in exercise of its delegated legislative powers. While issuing this Notification, the Central Government had followed the procedure prescribed under Sub Rule 2 and 3 of Rule 5 of Rules of 1986. It had invited objections from the public and considered those objections as is evident from the very recital of the Notification where it recorded "and where as all objection and suggestions received in response to above mentioned draft Notification have been duly considered by the Central Government....." and then it published the final Notification. Vide the Notification dated 1st December, 2009, the Central Government had substituted item no. 1(a) and the entries relating thereto of the Schedule to the Notification of 2006 besides making other amendments as well in different entries. However, while making further amendments vide Notification dated 9th September, 2013, the Central Government did not follow the prescribed procedure under Rule 5. On the contrary it substantially altered, and in fact substituted, as well as made additions of a substantial nature in Clause 4 and Clause 5 of the Notification of 2006, where, for the first time, it added minor mineral mine leases of less than 50 hectares, and also added 'general conditions to apply except for the projects where the area was less than 5 hectares in relation to minor mineral lease' and provisos thereto. The period for applying for renewal of mine lease of one year was changed to two years under the Notification dated 9th September, 2013."

87. There could be a case of executive instructions being derogatory to the principal statute or a statutory notification, still there could be cases of executive instructions being *ultra vires* or violative of the statutory notification and still further there could be cases of conflict between the two. In either of them, the Court have

not tilted in favour of sustaining such executive instructions. In the case of *D.D.A. and Ors. v. Joginder S. Monga and Ors.*, (2004) 2 SCC 297, the Supreme Court held that only in a case where a conflict arises between a statute and an executive instruction, indisputably, the former will prevail over the latter. Executive instructions can supplement a statute, but they cannot run contrary to statutory provisions or whittle down their effect. In other words, executive instruction which is in conflict of and which whittles down the effect of the main Act would be liable to be struck down. When an executive instruction is beyond the power of the authority issuing the same, it would be *ultra vires* and whenever the instruction is found to be beyond the inherent jurisdiction, it would be wholly void. The delegatee can act only within the scope of delegation. The limitations are all with regard to the substance, procedure and form.

88. Another contention raised on behalf of the Respondent while relying upon the judgment of Supreme Court in the case of *Vineet Narain and Ors. v. Union of India (UOI) and Anr.*, (1998)1 SCC 226 and other cases, is that executive instructions are enforceable if they do not change the essentials of law. This contention cannot be accepted for reasons that are recorded in this part of the Judgment. By whatever nomenclature it is addressed, whether as executive instructions, policy decision or merely Office Memoranda issued in exercise of administrative power, their infirmities and lacunas of law would not alter. Favour of constitutionality is to be construed for such executive instructions. It is also the contention that these

instructions do not dilute the effect of law but make it more rigorous. Furthermore, it being a policy decision of the MoEF, the Tribunal should not interfere in it. We are also unable to appreciate as to how these Office Memoranda fill up the gaps in the Notification of 2006. An instrument which provides for disobedience of law and indiscriminately condones the violations of the substantive law in force, it cannot be termed as an instrument made to fill up the gaps. It would be an administrative order contrary to the statutory provisions. In fact, issuance of such kind of orders received judicial causticism and was deprecated by the Supreme Court in the case of *M.C. Mehta* (supra).

89. The impugned Office Memoranda are not only in conflict with the Notification of 2006, but in fact run contra thereto. What is not only intended but in fact is prohibited to be done, is being permitted by the impugned Office Memoranda. They have been issued without reference to any power or source of law and are neither pronounced nor authenticated in the name of the prescribed executive authority. Besides this, we have already noticed in great detail the various infirmities and defects from which these Office Memoranda suffer in fact and in law. This being the position of law in relation to issuance of executive instructions in exercise of executive power or delegated legislation, these Office Memoranda having been issued in exercise of administrative power, in any case, cannot withstand the legal scrutiny and resultantly, would be liable to be quashed.

Discussion on Issue No. 3:**3. Whether this Tribunal has no jurisdiction to quash both the impugned Office Memoranda?**

90. Except the intervener Applicants namely M/s SPR and RG Constructions and M/s Dugar, none of the Respondents have raised any objection to the jurisdiction of the Tribunal and competence of the Tribunal to deal with impugned Office Memoranda in accordance with law. According to these Project Proponents, this Tribunal has no power or jurisdiction to quash the Office Memoranda; they having been issued in exercise of the Executive Power of the Union and forming a part of a policy decision. In support of their contention, they relied upon the judgment of the Supreme Court in the case of *Madras Bar Association v. Union of India*, (2014) 10 SCC 1 and *Union of India (UOI) v. R. Gandhi, President, Madras Bar Association*, (2010) 11 SCC 1. On the other hand, the Applicants have primarily contended in the main application that the impugned Office Memoranda are administrative orders and would be subject to merit review by the Tribunal and such a situation would not alter even if it was in exercise of Executive Power of the Union/State. This Tribunal has been vested with Original, Appellate and Special jurisdiction in regard to directing payment of compensation for damage to and for restitution and restoration of the environment. The legislature in its wisdom worded the provisions relating to the jurisdiction of the Tribunal (Sections 14 to 17 of the Act of 2010) very widely, and with a clear intent to provide this Tribunal with jurisdiction of a very wide magnitude. Upon reading the various provisions of the Act of

2010 cumulatively and in light of the underlying scheme of the Act of 2010, including the definition of 'environment' in terms of Section 2(c) of the Act of 2010, it is quite clear that this Tribunal is having all the trappings of a Court and is conferred with the twin powers of judicial as well as merit review. There is no provision in the Act of 2010 which curtails the jurisdiction of the Tribunal to examine the validity and correctness of a delegated legislation and/or administrative or executive order passed by the Government including any of its instrumentalities or authorities. The fundamental principle for invoking the jurisdiction of this Tribunal is that, the question raised should be a substantial question relating to environment and should arise out of the implementation of the enactments specified in Schedule I of the Act of 2010. It could even relate to enforcement of any legal right relating to environment with regard to these enactments. Delegated or subordinate legislation, executive orders and/or administrative orders in so far as they relate to the implementation of the Scheduled Acts would be open to challenge before the Tribunal and hardly any argument can be raised that the documents like Office Memoranda would not be subject to judicial scrutiny before the Tribunal.

In fact, such an argument that this Tribunal would not have jurisdiction to examine legality and correctness of such Office Memorandum is without substance and in fact should not detain us any further, in view of the judgment of the five Member Bench of this Tribunal in the case of *Wilfred J. and Anr. v. Ministry of Environment & Forests and Ors.*, 2014 ALL (I) NGT REPORTER (2)

(DELHI) 137, where this Tribunal was concerned with a question whether this Tribunal being a creation of a statute is not vested with the powers of judicial review, so as to examine the constitutional validity/vires of such instruments as it would be tantamount to enlarging the jurisdiction of this Tribunal. We may notice that the Tribunal deliberated on the issue at some length and also did a comparative study of the various Acts like Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT), TELECOM DISPUTES SETTLEMENT & APPELLATE TRIBUNAL (TDSAT), Armed Forces Tribunal on the one hand and Act of 2010 on other hand. After referring to various judgments on the subject, Tribunal following the principles laid down by the Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court in *L. Chandra Kumar v. Union of India and others*, (1997) 3 SCC 261 held as under:

“85. The Courts and Tribunals that are engaged in judicial functions dispensing justice to the public at large are expected to have powers which are necessary to perform its basic functions. As already noticed, unless there is a specific exclusion, such normal powers stated to be inherent in its functioning. The Supreme Court in the case of *Grindlays Bank Ltd vs Central Government Industrial Tribunal And Ors.* AIR 1981 SC 606 while dealing with the powers of the Tribunal in relation to setting aside *ex parte* award in absence of any such power and the award which has become enforceable as a result of its being published rejecting the contention that the Tribunal had become *functus officio*, Court held as under:

“We are of the opinion that the Tribunal had the power to pass the impugned order if it thought fit in the interest of justice. It is true that there is no express provision in the Act or the rules framed thereunder giving the Tribunal jurisdiction to do so. But it is a well-known rule of statutory construction that a Tribunal or body should be considered to be endowed with such ancillary or incidental powers as are necessary to discharge its functions effectively for the purpose of doing justice

between the parties. In a case of this nature, we are of the view that the Tribunal should be considered as invested with such incidental or ancillary powers unless there is any indication in the statute to the contrary. We do not find any such statutory prohibition. On the other hand, there are indications to the contrary.”

86. From the above, it is clear that ancillary or incidentally powers which are necessary to discharge its functions effectively for the purpose of doing justice between the parties should be considered to be endowed. If the power of judicial review in its limited scope is not expected to be endowed upon the Tribunal then majority of the cases wherein Orders, Circulars, Notifications issued in exercise of subordinate legislation are challenged could not be fully and completely decided by the Tribunal, though they exclusively fall in the domain of the Tribunal.

87. Another very important aspect that cannot be overlooked by the Tribunal is that Article 226 of the Constitution of India is a discretionary jurisdiction to be exercised by the High Courts. It does not give an absolute right to a person. For variety of reasons, the High Court may decline to entertain a petition in exercise of its powers under Article 226 of the Constitution, while the NGT Act gives a statutory right to an Applicant, aggrieved person or any person to approach the Tribunal in all matters relating to Acts specified in Schedule I of the NGT Act. It is not a discretionary jurisdiction like under Article 226 of the Constitution of India.

88. On a comparative analysis of various provisions of the different Acts afore-stated, it is evident that power, jurisdiction, judicial independence, exclusion of jurisdiction and other determinative factors prescribed under the NGT Act are of wide connotation and are free of restrictions. Sections 14, 15 and 16 read co-jointly give three different jurisdictions to the Tribunal over all disputes and appeals relating to various fields of environment. The jurisdiction is exercisable in relation to the matters arising from any or all of the Scheduled Acts. Examined objectively, the provisions of the NGT Act are more akin to the provisions of the CAT Act, in contradistinction to the provisions of the TDSAT. The various features and aspects of the NGT Act that we have discussed above would bring the case before the Tribunal within the ambit of *L. Chandra Kumar* case (supra), as opposed to the case being covered by *BSNL* case (supra). We have already dealt above, in some

elaboration, the aspect as to how the cases relied upon by the Respondents do not apply to the facts of the present case, keeping in view the provisions and the legislative scheme of the referred Acts and various judicial pronouncements. At the cost of repetition, we may record here that the language of the various provisions of the NGT Act by necessary implication gives power of judicial review to the Tribunal. There is no specific or even by necessary implication exclusion of such power indicated in any of the provisions. Furthermore, in the scheme of various environmental acts and if the object and purpose of such acts are to be achieved then the power of judicial review would have to be read into the provisions of the NGT Act. If the notifications issued under any of the Scheduled Acts, by virtue of the powers vested by subordinate or delegated legislation, are *ultra vires* the Act itself or are unconstitutional as they violate Articles 14 or 19 of the Constitution of India, then it has to be construed that the Tribunal is vested with the power of examining such notifications so as to completely and comprehensively decide the disputes, applications, appeals before it. Of course, the powers of the High Courts and the Supreme Court under Articles 226 and 32 of the Constitution of India have not been excluded under the provisions of the NGT Act, thus ensuring that the Tribunal performs supplemental functions and does not supplant the Higher Courts.

89. The Supreme Court in the case of *K.S. Venkatraman and Co. v. State of Madras*, (1966) 2 SCR 229, has stated the proposition that an authority or Tribunal constituted under an Act cannot, unless expressly so authorised, question the validity of the Act or any provisions thereof under which it is constituted. This is a sound principle and has been followed consistently. To put it in other words, a Tribunal or an authority constituted under an Act can even examine the validity of the provisions of the Act which created it, provided it is so expressly authorized by the Act itself. This Tribunal is not travelling into that realm of law, but is concerned with the validity of the notifications issued under the Acts other than the Act that created the National Green Tribunal. For this proposition, we have referred to various judgments above.

95. Reverting to the present case the CRZ Notification dated 19th February, 1991, which has been amended on 3rd of October, 2001, was issued in exercise of the powers conferred under Section 3(1) and Section (2) (v) of the Act of 1986 and Rule 5(3) (d) of the Rules of 1986, in declaring coastal stretches as coastal

regulation zone and for regulating activities in the coastal regulation zone. The legislature has delegated legislative power to the Central Government to take all measures as it deems necessary or expedient for the purposes of protecting and improving quality of the environment and preventing controlling and abating environmental pollution. This is a very wide power, which has been vested in the Central Government by delegated legislation under these provisions. In the exercise of its powers and with the object of satisfying the stated purpose, the Notification of 2011 has been issued under the power of delegated/subordinate legislation. Thus, there cannot be any doubt that the Notification of 2011 in the case before us, is a piece of delegated legislation and its legality, correctness or otherwise can be questioned only on the limited grounds afore-stated.

96. To bring out this distinction illustratively and more clearly, we may refer to the power of the MoEF (Central Government) to issue Environmental Clearance in terms of the provisions of the Act of 1986 read with the Regulations of 2006. The order granting or refusing Environmental Clearance to a Project Proponent, is not an act of subordinate or delegated legislation but clearly is an executive act. The Central Government in exercise of its executive powers, passes an order whether or not a given project should be granted Environmental Clearance for commencing its operation. In passing such orders, the Central Government does not act in furtherance to the powers vested in it by virtue of delegated legislation. It is merely an executive act relatable to the statutory powers vested in the Central Government. The CRZ Notification issued by the Central Government is therefore an act of delegated legislation while passing of an order of Environmental Clearance is an executive order. This view finds support from the judgment of the Delhi High Court in the case of *Utkarsh Mandal vs. Union of India*, Writ Petition (civil) no. 9340/2009 which held that “grant of environmental clearance is an executive order which involves application of mind by the executive.”

91. It is to be noticed at this stage that a Civil Appeal had been preferred before the Supreme Court of India against this Judgment in Civil Appeal No. 7884-7885 of 2014 titled as *Vizhinjam International Seaport Ltd v. Wilfred J. and Ors.* Hon’ble Supreme Court vide its order dated 21st January, 2015, stayed all further

proceedings before the Tribunal in that case but specifically allowed Tribunal to continue its exercise of such powers. Order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court is reproduced below:

“Counter affidavit, if any, be filed by the Respondents within four weeks' time. Rejoinder affidavit, if any, in two weeks' time thereafter.

In the meantime, both the sides are permitted to file additional affidavit(s).

All further proceedings, qua the appellant(s) are stayed in Appeal Nos. 17 of 2014, 88 of 2014, 14 of 2014 and Original Application No. 74 of 2014 till further orders.

We clarify that the National Green Tribunal shall continue to exercise its powers in terms of Sections 14, 16 and 18 of the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010 in other cases.”

92. We may also refer to another larger Bench Judgment of the Tribunal in the case of *Himmat Singh Shekhawat v. State of Rajasthan and Ors.* (supra), where the Tribunal was dealing with a case challenging the validity of the Office Memoranda dated 9th September, 2013 and 24th December, 2013 issued by MoEF and other similar Office Memoranda issued the State of Rajasthan as well as other states as being violative of the provisions of the Act of 1986 and being in teeth of the Judgment of the Supreme Court in the case of *Deepak Kumar v. State of Haryana*, (2012) 4 SCC 629.

As stated above, the Tribunal had quashed the Notifications which were in violation to the Notification of 2006 and in teeth of the Judgment of the Supreme Court. It was held that the Notification of 2006 being a statutory law cannot be diluted, varied and frustrated in the name of supplying of gaps and/or framing the policy in interest of a group of people.

The Notification or orders whether issued by the principle or delegated authority, the principle that delegated legislation cannot be beyond the principle legislation equally applies to both. As discussed above, the body to whom the power is delegated is required to act strictly within the framework of such delegated powers. It is incidental to the exercise of all powers in as much as it is necessary to delegate for the proper discharge of all the public duties. It is because the body constituted should act in the manner indicated in law and should exercise its discretion by following the procedure therein itself, it has to be ensured by the delegate authority that it exercises such power for carrying out the purpose and object of the Act and does not interfere with or offend the substantive provisions of the Act. The discipline and protocol prescribed in a statutory instrument ought not to be altered much less defeated.

93. In light of the above stated principles, now we would revert to the judgments of the Supreme Court relied upon by the Respondent nos. 7 and 8. Firstly, we are unable to comprehend as to how the said Respondents can derive any advantage from the two cited judgments. In the first case of *Union of India (UOI) v. R. Gandhi, President, Madras Bar Association* (supra) (2010 case), the Supreme Court was concerned with the constitutional validity of the provisions of the Company's Act, 1956. The Supreme Court stated that the legislature is presumed not to legislate contrary to the rule of law and therefore knows that where disputes are to be adjudicated by a judicial body other than Courts, its standard

should approximately be the same as to what is expected of the main stream judiciary. Rule of law is possible only where there is an independent and impartial judiciary to render justice. Further, the Supreme Court while declining to declare the Act and constitution of the National Company Law Tribunal as unconstitutional in Para 120 directed the defects in parts 1B and 1C of the Act relating to appointment and functioning of the Tribunal to be corrected / amended and then be made operational. The Supreme Court affirmed the view of the High Court that the constitution of the two Tribunals and vesting in them the powers of judicial review was not unconstitutional. However, it was subject to the observations made by the Supreme Court in paragraph 120 of the judgment.

Coming to the second case of *Madras Bar Association v. Union of India (UOI) and Ors.* (supra) (2014 case), where the Supreme Court was concerned with the question whether provisions of the National Tax Tribunal (NTT) Act, 2005 were *ultra vires* to provisions of Constitution including the 'doctrine of separation of power'. The Supreme Court held that since Sections 5, 6, 7, 8 and 13 of the NTT Act have already been held as illegal and unconstitutional, therefore the remaining provisions of the Act are automatically rendered otiose to the extent indicated in paras 136 and 137 of the Judgment. The Hon'ble Apex Court made the following conclusions:

“134. (i) Parliament has the power to enact legislation, and to vest adjudicatory functions, earlier vested in the High Court, with an alternative court/tribunal. Exercise of such power by the Parliament would not per se violate the "basic structure" of the Constitution.

135. (ii) Recognized constitutional conventions pertaining to the Westminster model, do not debar the legislating authority from enacting legislation to vest

adjudicatory functions, earlier vested in a superior court, with an alternative court/tribunal. Exercise of such power by the Parliament would per se not violate any constitutional convention.

136. (iii) The "basic structure" of the Constitution will stand violated, if while enacting legislation pertaining to transfer of judicial power, Parliament does not ensure, that the newly created court/tribunal, conforms with the salient characteristics and standards, of the court sought to be substituted.

137. (iv) Constitutional conventions, pertaining to constitutions styled on the Westminster model, will also stand breached, if while enacting legislation, pertaining to transfer of judicial power, conventions and salient characteristics of the court sought to be replaced, are not incorporated in the court/tribunal sought to be created.

138. (v) The prayer made in Writ Petition (C) No. 621 of 2007 is declined. Company Secretaries are held ineligible, for representing a party to an appeal before the NTT.

139. (vi) Examined on the touchstone of conclusions (iii) and (iv) above, Sections 5, 6, 7, 8 and 13 of the NTT Act (to the extent indicated hereinabove), are held to be unconstitutional. Since the aforesaid provisions, constitute the edifice of the NTT Act, and without these provisions the remaining provisions are rendered ineffective and inconsequential, the entire enactment is declared unconstitutional.”

From the above dictum of the Supreme Court, it is clear that the Parliament has power to enact legislations and to vest adjudicatory functions in the Tribunals which were earlier vested in the High Court. *Per se*, this would not be violative of the basic structure of the Constitution, once the framers of law take care and ensure that the statutorily created courts/tribunals conform to the salient characteristics and standards of the courts under the mainstream justice dispensation system, i.e. judiciary. If they are breached, it would generate the results of violation of doctrine of basic structure of the Constitution.

94. Before the Tribunal, no contention of this dimension has been raised. As already stated, the Tribunal has been created by a statute with all requisite safeguards and has been vested with complete adjudicatory powers as required under the mainstream justice delivery system in our country. The impugned Office Memoranda have been issued in exercise of administrative power which is presumably exercised in furtherance to the powers vested in the Ministry under the Act of 1986 and /or Notification of 2006. These Office Memoranda have been issued for the purposes of 'implementation of Acts mentioned in the Schedule' (emphasis supplied). Thus, we see no reason for accepting the contention that this Tribunal has no jurisdiction to examine the legality or correctness of these Office Memoranda. Furthermore, except these two Respondents, none of the other parties to the *lis* has even touched upon this objection.

Discussion on Issue No. 4

4. Are the private Respondents entitled to claim any benefit on the strength of deeming provisions as contained in Para 8 (iii) of the Notification of 2006 and if so, to what effect?

95. The submission on behalf of Respondent no. 7, 8 and 9 that they would be deemed to have been granted Environmental Clearance in relation to their projects on the strength of Para 8, of the Notification of 2006, can be bifurcated into two distinct classes. The first being with reference to the projects of Respondent no. 7 and 8 where the contention is that they had applied for obtaining Environmental Clearance for their project and the same had been recommended by the SEAC in its meeting dated 17th June, 2014

and 30th September, 2013 respectively. Despite such recommendation being in their favour, the SEIAA did not grant or refuse Environmental Clearance within 45 days of such recommendation as per Para 8(i) of the Notification of 2006. Therefore, as per Respondent 7 and 8 since the period of 45 days has lapsed, therefore, they would be entitled to the 'deemed sanction' of Environmental Clearance in terms of Para 8 of the Notification of 2006, the regulatory authority having failed to take any final view on the Project Proponent's application. It is their case that the 'deemed sanction' would follow in terms of Para 8(iii) and the view expressed by the SEAC would be deemed to have been accepted by the regulatory authority and therefore, the Applicant is entitled to be conveyed the said order in terms thereof.

The second class of contention would be with reference to the contention of Respondent no. 9 that it had applied for obtaining Environmental Clearance for its project in the year 2012, which application was re-filed in the year 2013. The SEIAA had failed to act within the time limit provided in Clause 8 (i) of the Notification of 2006, i.e. 105 days. This failure on the part of the SEIAA would result in grant of Environmental Clearance in favour of the Project Proponent on the principle of 'deeming fiction'. It is the case of Respondent no. 9 that SEIAA had only responded after two years by communicating that the operation of the impugned Office Memoranda has been stayed by the National Green Tribunal and therefore their application for Environmental Clearance has been delisted till further order by the Tribunal.

96. Contrary to the above, the Applicant contends that there is nothing in Para 8 of the Notification of 2006, which is remotely suggestive of any deeming fiction. It is a provision that merely prescribes a period within which certain acts are required to be done without specifying any consequences thereof. Furthermore, none of the Respondents have filed applications with all the relevant documents as required under law. They have not even filed their applications for Environmental Clearance complete in all respects. They have played a fraud with law and in any case misrepresented facts before SEIAA. Even after filing the application for Environmental Clearance, they have violated their undertakings to SEIAA and carried on with the constructions of their projects. This firstly would disentitle them from claiming any relief on the premise of 'deeming fiction' contained under Para 8 of the Notification of 2006, and in any case their acts and deeds would vitiate their entire application for grant of Environmental Clearance. The effect of 'deeming fiction' would thus never accrue in their favour. Once the provisions of the Notification of 2006 are not strictly complied with, the question of invoking 'deeming fiction' in terms of Para 8 of the Notification of 2006 would not even arise as these Project Proponents have not complied with the basic ingredients of these provisions.

97. We must make a note of the fact that none of the other parties, including the MoEF or SEIAA had raised the plea of 'deeming fiction' either in their oral or written submissions. Before adverting to the discussion on merits of these contentions, it will be

appropriate to refer to Para 8 of the Notification of 2006 which reads as under:

“8. Grant or Rejection of Prior Environmental Clearance (EC):

(i) The regulatory authority shall consider the recommendations of the EAC or SEAC concerned and convey its decision to the Applicant within forty five days of the receipt of the recommendations of the Expert Appraisal Committee or State Level Expert Appraisal Committee concerned or in other words within one hundred and five days of the receipt of the final Environment Impact Assessment Report, and where Environment Impact Assessment is not required, within one hundred and five days of the receipt of the complete application with requisite documents, except as provided below.

(ii) The regulatory authority shall normally accept the recommendations of the Expert Appraisal Committee or State Level Expert Appraisal Committee concerned. In cases where it disagrees with the recommendations of the Expert Appraisal Committee or State Level Expert Appraisal Committee concerned, the regulatory authority shall request reconsideration by the Expert Appraisal Committee or State Level Expert Appraisal Committee concerned within forty five days of the receipt of the recommendations of the Expert Appraisal Committee or State Level Expert Appraisal Committee concerned while stating the reasons for the disagreement. An intimation of this decision shall be simultaneously conveyed to the Applicant. The Expert Appraisal Committee or State Level Expert Appraisal Committee concerned, in turn, shall consider the observations of the regulatory authority and furnish its views on the same within a further period of sixty days. The decision of the regulatory authority after considering the views of the Expert Appraisal Committee or State Level Expert Appraisal Committee concerned shall be final and conveyed to the Applicant by the regulatory authority concerned within the next thirty days.

(iii) In the event that the decision of the regulatory authority is not communicated to the Applicant within the period specified in sub-paragraphs (i) or (ii) above, as applicable, the Applicant may proceed as if the environment clearance sought for has been granted or denied by the regulatory authority in

terms of the final recommendations of the Expert Appraisal Committee or State Level Expert Appraisal Committee concerned.”

98. First and foremost we have to examine what is a deeming fiction, when it operates and what are its ingredients? The expressions ‘deemed’ and ‘deeming fiction’ have been described in P RAMANATHA AIYAR’S Law Lexicon 3rd edition, 2012 as follows:

“Deemed: The word ‘deemed’ is used to impose an artificial construction of a word or phrase in a statute that would not otherwise prevail. Sometimes it is used to put beyond doubt a particular construction that might otherwise be uncertain. Sometimes it is used to give a comprehensive description that includes what is obvious, what is uncertain and what is impossible. *St. Aubyn (L.M.) v. A.G.*, 1952 AC 15

Deeming fiction: A supposition of law that a thing is true without inquiring whether it be so or not, that it may have the effect of truth so far as it is consistent with justice.

The word "deemed" is used in various senses. Sometimes, it means "generally regarded". At other time, it signifies 'taken prima facie to be', while in other case, it means, 'taken conclusively'. Its various meanings are, - 'to deem' is 'to hold in belief, estimation or opinion'; to judge; adjudge; decide; considered to be; to have or to be of an opinion; to esteem; to suppose, to think, decide or believe on considerations.”

99. Deeming fiction in a provision of a statute is indicative of the intention of the framers of law that they expect compliance to the requirements of the provision in a prescribed time frame. In some cases, it may prescribe proper consequences of default while in others it may be just require compliance *simplicitor*. When such words are used in a statute, they would provide the meaning for some matters or things and the way in which it is to be adopted. Furthermore, every provision of a statute is brought into by

legislature with a particular object in mind; no word used by the legislature is therefore futile. Normally, such words should be interpreted with the aid of examining the whole scheme of an enactment, like the Notification of 2006 in the present case. Therefore, impact of the expression used under paragraph 8 should be examined and interpreted in light of the entire scheme of the Notification of 2006. The concept of 'deeming fiction' should be understood and interpreted by applying the principle of strict construction. Every requirement preceding the stage from which 'deeming fiction' operates must be specified in all respects and the principle of substantial compliance would have no application for determining the controversy in issue. A Bench of this Tribunal in the case of *M/s Laxmi Suiting v. State of Rajasthan and Ors.*, 2014 ALL (I) NGT REPORTER (2) DELHI 1, while dealing with the essentials and ingredients of 'deeming fiction' contained in Section 25(7) of the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 (for short 'Water Act') held as under:

“33. A deeming provision creates a legal fiction. When a statute enacts that something shall be deemed to have been done, which in fact and in truth has not been done, the court is entitled and bound to ascertain for what purpose and between what persons the statutory fiction is to be resorted to. After ascertaining the purpose, full effect must be given to the statutory fiction and it should be carried out to its logical conclusion and to that end, it would be proper and even necessary to assume all those facts on which alone the fiction can operate. In other words, the facts and requirements of the fiction must be satisfied. It has, in fact, also been held by some courts that the word 'deemed' when used in a statute establishes a conclusive or rebuttal presumption, depending upon the context.

34. Another legal principle of construing the legal fiction is that the law cannot be extended beyond its purpose.

The Supreme Court, in the case of *Bengal Immunity Co. Ltd. v. State of Bihar* (AIR 1955 SC 661) stated that the legal fictions are created only for some definite purpose. A legal fiction is to be limited to that purpose for which it was created and should not be extended beyond that legitimate field. This approach was reiterated by the Supreme Court of India in the case of *Union of India v. Sampat Raj Dugar* (AIR 1992 SC 1417), wherein while dealing with Clause 5(3)(ii) of the Import (Control) Order, held that fiction created was for the proper implementation of the Import and Export (Control) Act, 1947 and to hold the licensee responsible for anything and everything that happens from the time of import till the goods are cleared through Customs and it was also held that the fiction cannot be employed to attribute ownership of imported goods to the importer in a case where he abandons them i.e. in a situation where the importer does not pay or receive the documents of title. Reference can also be made to the case of *Rajkumar Khurana v. State of NCT of Delhi* [(2009) 6 SCC 72].

35. Section 25(7) is intended to provide for the deemed fiction only where the law is complied with. The obvious reason for providing the deeming fiction under Section 25 of the Water Act is to ensure that the Board does not unduly withhold the application of an industry or a unit which has acted in accordance with the law and has moved the application for establishment/operation complete in all respects to the Board. The intention of the framers of law is to balance the relationship between the industry and the Board. It is not intended to give any undue or unlawful advantage to either of the two. The Board must not be able to frustrate the establishment of a project merely by delaying its decision on the application. It is also not intended to give any right to the industry to start its operation without obtaining consent of the Board or even making an application for that purpose. On the principle aforesaid, it will not be permissible to stretch the provisions of Section 25 of the Water Act to give protection to the class of persons who are polluters and are even covered under the specified category contemplated under Section 25(5) supra.

36. In view of the above discussion, we are of the considered view that the Applicants are not entitled to the benefit or advantage of the deeming fiction of law contemplated under Section 25(7) of the Water Act *inter alia* but specifically for the following reasons:

- (i) The Applicants did not submit applications, as contemplated under Section 25(2) of the Water Act, complete in all respects to the Board.”

In the above backdrop, let us now examine as to what is the object and essential features contained in Para 8 of the Notification of 2006. The Notification of 2006 has been issued by the Ministry in exercise of the statutory powers vested in it under Section 3 of the Act of 1986 and Rule 5 of the Rules of 1986. The Notification has been issued for the purposes of effectively ensuring environmental protection and for implementing the provisions contained in the Principal Act. The purpose is to ensure that the project and the activities as stated in the Schedule to the Notification of 2006 only and only commence construction after the Project Proponent has obtained the Environmental Clearance and that is why Para 2 of the Notification of 2006 requires prior Environmental Clearance from the regulatory authority. The whole scheme of the Notification of 2006 does not postulate any relaxation of this mandatory requirement. Thus, there is unquestionable and undisputable legal obligation upon the Project Proponent to seek prior Environmental Clearance before the commencement of any activity in relation to the project in question. Such obligation is to be complied with as per Form 1 or supplementary Form 1A, as the case may be, to be submitted to the concerned regulatory authority. Form 1 has various columns which would be incapable of being filled and it will be impracticable, if not impossible, for an applicant to furnish the requisite data supported by appropriate analysis, as contemplated in the various columns of Form 1. Still further, the requirement on

the part of the Project Proponent would be to have a complete EIA report on the basis of ToR which again is relatable to the application (Form 1) submitted by the Project Proponent. The authorities are neither required under any law nor under any memorandum of practice to conduct any inspection to verify the contents of the application or the physical situation existing on the site. The averments in the application are normally taken to be correct. It is evident from the record before us that Project Proponents have violated the law and because of their intentional violation and illegal acts of the private Respondents, compliance to the provisions of Notification of the 2006, has been rendered impracticable. The provisions of Para 8(i) to 8(iii) would come into play only when an Applicant complies with his statutory obligations and satisfies the essential requirements of this provision strictly. Indisputably these private Respondents have not done so. Until and unless a complete, comprehensive application in accordance with Form 1 and supplementary Form 1A as per Appendix I and II of the Notification of 2006 respectively, complete in all respects, is submitted, nothing contained in these provisions would come into play much less than it would enable the Project Proponents to claim any advantage or benefit on the plea of deemed fiction.

100. There is a definite process required to be followed, i.e., Screening, Scoping and Appraisal, in addition to Public Consultation, which would lead to passing of an order granting or refusing Environmental Clearance in terms of the Notification of 2006, in cases where SEAC has recommended grant or refusal of

Environmental Clearance. The matter then has to be placed before the regulatory authority, i.e. SEIAA, which is empowered to alter such recommendation of SEAC, agree with the same or take completely contra view. However, where it proposes to disagree with the recommendations of SEAC, the SEAC would be required to give its views within 60 days from the date when the file was returned to it by SEIAA for reconsideration and intimation would also be given to the Project Proponent before it takes the final view. It is only when the requirements of Para 8(i) and (ii) have been complied with that any 'deeming fiction' in terms of Para 8(iii) can come into play. After the view of SEAC is considered by the regulatory authority, then it would convey its decision within next 30 days to the Project Proponent. It is only if the decision of the regulatory authority is not intimated that the Project Proponent may proceed as if the Environmental Clearance sought for has been granted or denied by the regulatory authority in terms of the final recommendations of the EAC or the SEAC as the case may be. The word 'deemed' has to be construed differently with reference to the provisions of the Act where it is so used. When a statute enacts that something shall be deemed to have been done, which in fact and in reality was not done, the court is entitled and in fact bound to ascertain for what purposes and between what persons such statutory fiction is to be resorted to and full effect must then be given to the statutory fiction and it should be carried to its logical conclusion. It has been time and again emphasized in various judgments of various courts, including that of the Supreme Court, that the Court has to

ascertain the purpose of the legal fiction, as the term 'deemed' has been used for manifold purposes (Refer: *The State of Bombay v. Pandurang Vinayak Chaphalkar and Ors.*, AIR 1953 SC 244 and *B.B. Chibber v. Anand Lok Cooperative GRP Housing Society Ltd.*, AIR 2001 Delhi 348). These Principles were also reiterated by the Supreme Court in the case of *Aneeta Hada v. Godfather Travels and Tours Pvt. Ltd.*, (2012) 5 SCC 661, where the Court held as under:

“29. In *The Bengal Immunity Company Ltd. v. State of Bihar and Ors.* MANU/SC/0083/1955: AIR 1955 SC 661, the majority in the Constitution Bench have opined that legal fictions are created only for some definite purpose.”

101. 'Deeming fiction' as an established concept of law, has to be construed strictly and completely according to the facts and circumstances of a case. The dimension of its application would depend upon the language of the provisions where 'deeming fiction' is contained, its purpose and the object sought to be achieved under those provisions and the attendant circumstances of a particular case. It is neither possible nor permissible to prescribe a strait-jacket formula for applicability of this fiction in law. Upon a bare reading of Para 8(i) of the Notification 2006, it is evident that it does not contain any 'deeming fiction'. On the contrary, it only prescribes a time period within which the application for grant of Environmental Clearance should be decided and order is to be communicated to the Project Proponent. This clause does not provide for any consequences if the said decision was not taken within the prescribed time.

102. Para 8 (i) provides that the regulatory authority has to convey its decision to the Applicant within 45 days of the receipt of the recommendation of the EAC or SEAC, as the case may be, or convey its decision within 105 days of the receipt of the final Environment Impact Assessment report. In case where Environment Impact Assessment is not required, then, within 105 days of the receipt of the *complete application with requisite document* (emphasis supplied). Para 8 (ii) further provides that the regulatory authority shall normally accept the recommendation of the EAC or SEAC but wherever it decides to disagree with such recommendations, regulatory authority shall request reconsideration by the EAC or SEAC as the case may be, within 45 days of the receipt of the recommendations made to it, along with reason for its disagreement. Such intimation of decision is also to be conveyed to the Applicant.

103. EAC or SEAC as the case may be, in turn, shall consider the observations of the regulatory authority and furnish its views on the same within a further period of 60 days. Whereupon, the regulatory authority, after considering the view as furnished by the EAC or SEAC as the case may be, should take its decision, which shall be final and which would be conveyed to the Applicant within the next 30 days. In other words this entire exercise has to be completed within 135 days. Both these Paras i.e. 8(i) and 8(ii) do not provide for any consequences of default. It is Para 8(iii) of the Notification of 2006, which provides for a kind of deeming fiction. In terms of this Para, if the decision of the regulatory authority is not

communicated to the Applicant within the period specified in Para 8 (i) & (ii), the Applicant may proceed as if the Environmental Clearance sought for has been granted or denied by the regulatory authority in terms of the final recommendations of the EAC or SEAC as the case may be. For the provision of Para 8(iii) to become effective the following conditions are required to be satisfied:-

- (1) The application submitted by the Applicant to the SEIAA or the MoEF as the case may be, should be complete in all respects along with requisite documents.
- (2) All the requisite proceedings contemplated under the Notification of 2006 must be completed, i.e. preparation of Terms of Reference (ToR) and submission of final EIA report.
- (3) There should be unambiguous recommendation by the SEAC or EAC, for granting or refusing to grant the Environmental Clearance. After submission of the final EIA report (wherever required) and upon completing the procedure prescribed under Clause 8(ii), the matter should remain pending and the Applicant uninformed of the order, for the period of 105 days or 135 days, as the case may be.

104. It is only thereafter that the deeming fiction contained in Para 8(iii) can operate, but even then the clear mandate of the Legislature is that the Environmental Clearance to a Project should not be deemed to have been granted to the Project Proponent. It will only be the recommendation of the EAC or SEAC that would

enable the Applicant to proceed with his project in terms of the said recommendations. The limited operation of the deeming fiction under Para 8, is only the final recommendation of the EAC or the SEAC, as the case may be, that would operate by fiction of law as the order of the regulatory authority. It is because of the default on the part of the regulatory authority to pass the final order that results in invoking the principle of 'deeming fiction' as contemplated under Para 8(iii) of the Notification of 2006.

105. The Project Proponent has to mandatorily comply with the requirements of Para 8(i) and 8(ii) strictly. The principle of substantial compliance and/or inability on the part of the Applicant to file an application, complete in all respects, would not be a relevant consideration for invoking deeming fiction under Para 8 (iii) of the 2006 Notification. Like in economics, other things must remain the same for application of any principle of economics. Similarly, filling up details of Form-A completely and accurately is as essential before consideration of an application for grant of Environmental Clearance.

106. Now, let us examine whether any of the three Project Proponents, claiming advantage of the principle of 'deeming fiction' have satisfied the above stated requirements of law or not. It must be noticed here that any Applicant who seeks benefit under the law of deeming fiction has to satisfy the twin requirements of firstly doing the acts/activities which are lawful and secondly, he must comply with requirements of the provisions *stricto sensu*. In the present case all the three Project Proponents i.e. Respondent nos. 7,

8 & 9 have commenced construction activity of their Projects without even submitting the application for grant of Environmental Clearance. The Project Proponents have obviously not submitted an application complete in all respects and with requisite documents. We have already noticed that there are large numbers of columns in Form 1 and supplementary Form 1A under the Notification of 2006, which these Project Proponents have not and in fact could not have filled appropriately in the corresponding forms to be accompanied with the application for Environmental Clearance. These columns require them to submit data and analysis reports, which it was not possible for them to provide, having already raised huge constructions. Furthermore, all the three Project Proponents were sent different letters from SEIAA, asking them for additional documents and information in respect of their projects which their respective applications lacked. In this regard reference could be made to letters dated 22nd August, 2013, 28th April, 2014, 20th June, 2014, 19th May, 2014 and 17th June, 2014 to SPR & RG, letters dated 21st June, 2013, 08th August, 2013 and 10th September, 2013 to M/s Dugar Housing and letter dated 21st May, 2013 to SAS Realtors Ltd. In the letters addressed by SEIAA to these Project Proponents acknowledging receipt of their application for Environmental Clearance, it had clearly indicated that this does not vest any right in the Project Proponent and they should not start or carry on any construction activity until and unless Environmental Clearance was granted to them. The Project Proponents were permitted only to clear the site and raise

temporary structures for accommodation of labour along with basic facilities, as temporary arrangements. The Project Proponents violated the requirements of law and the undertaking given by them to SEIAA at the time of submission of application for Environmental Clearance. The Notification of 2006 contemplates prior Environmental Clearance to any structure or project activity. The Project Proponents having violated the law cannot be permitted to take advantage of their own wrong under the shelter of 'deeming fiction'. The conduct of these Project Proponents and serious violation of law committed by them *inter alia* disables them from claiming the benefit of 'deeming fiction' under Para 8 of the Notification of 2006 in the facts and circumstances of the case. Furthermore, it is not the case of anybody before us that SEAC had recommended the grant of Environmental Clearance to Project Proponents unconditionally. The recommendation was conditional and it was not grant of Environmental Clearance in fact and in substance. The Project Proponent was to first satisfy the regulatory authority that it had fulfilled the conditions that had been imposed in the recommendation of the concerned authority. In other words, it was not a case of clear recommendation for grant of Environmental Clearance which could have become operative upon expiry of the prescribed period. In the case of M/s. SPR & RG Construction Private Limited (Respondent No. 7) the SEAC in its meeting on 30th September, 2013 decided to recommend proposal only for grant of standard ToR and to conduct EIA study in addition to compliance to the conditions which were to be incorporated in

the ToR. One out of them related to NOC from Chief Controller of Explosives, adequacy feasibility and functionality of STP to be verified by the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board.

However, in its meeting on 17th June, 2014, the proposal of Respondent no. 7 was recommended for issue of Environmental Clearance, but only after considering the conditions imposed on the project. These conditions were as follows:-

1. "Project land area excluding landscape area not less than 15% shall be earmarked for green belt development.
2. The adequacy and feasibility of the STP proposed for the project shall be verified by Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board as per the ToR condition.
3. Design of the rain water harvesting facility shall be done based on soil lithology study and the same shall be consulted with any Academic Institution.
4. Plan of solid waste management including disposal, in tie-up with local NGO shall be furnished.
5. Revised Budget Allocation (0.5% of the project outlay) & detailed work plan for the CSR Activities shall be furnished in an AFFIDAVIT Form."

107. There is nothing on record to show and is not even the case of the Project Proponent that the above conditions have been complied with and the Authorities referred herein further confirm non-compliance thereto. Thus, there was no unambiguous and unequivocal grant of Environmental Clearance recommendation to the Regulatory Authority by the SEAC.

From the above discussion it is clear that none of the Project Proponents satisfied the basic essentials or requirements of Para 8 of the Notification of 2006. Non-compliance to law, intentional violation of law and further, the illegal conduct of the Project

Proponent would disentitle them from getting any relief under Para 8 of the Notification of 2006.

Discussion on Issue No. 5

5. Whether the provisions of Notification of 2006 are mandatory or directory and consequences thereof?

108. Years back, Lord Campbell in *Liverpool Borough Bank v. Turner*, (1861) 30 LJ Ch 379 said, “no universal rule can be laid down as to whether mandatory enactments shall be considered directory only or obligatory with an implied nullification for disobedience. It is the duty of courts of justice to try to get at the real intention of the Legislature by carefully attending to the whole scope of the statute to be considered”. These observations have stood the tests of time and even today the process of judicial interpretation has not favoured the enunciation of any universal rule or strait jacket formula. This question has to be decided with reference to the intent of the Legislature, and not the language in which the intention is clothed. In some cases, the courts have also taken the view that such intent can be derived from the nature and design of the statute and the consequences which would flow from construing it in the one way or the other. It will depend upon the findings of the court on these aspects that would finally determine whether the provision is mandatory or directory. The use of the words ‘as nearly as may be’ in contrast to the words ‘at least’ will *prima facie* indicate a directory requirement, negative words indicate a mandatory requirement, ‘may’ indicate a directory requirement and ‘shall’ a mandatory requirement. Illustratively it could be explained by taking an example of a set of service rules

which provide that adverse remarks shall be communicated to the civil servant concerned, ordinarily within seven months. The object of communicating the adverse remarks is to give an opportunity to the civil servant to improve his performance to make up the deficiency noticed in his work and to give him an opportunity to represent against the remarks, in case he disputes them, to the reviewing authority. In light of this object and having regard to the part adverse remarks play in the service career, the rules on a proper construction will require: (i) communication of the remarks to the civil servant concerned; (ii) communication within a reasonable time; and (iii) communication ordinarily within seven months. The first two requirements will be construed as mandatory and non-compliance of either of them will make the remarks as also any adverse action on their basis, invalid. The third requirement will be treated as directory and its non-compliance alone will not make the remarks invalid if the first two requirements are satisfied [Refer: Principles of Statutory Interpretation by Justice G.P. Singh, 13th Edition (2012)].

In either of these requirements, discretion or discretionary power hardly has a role to play. Even if a provision is being construed as directory, it has to be remembered that it leaves the donee of the powers, free to use or not to use it, at his discretion. A mandatory provision eliminates the element of discretion. A mandatory provision requires complete compliance. Non-compliance or disobedience thereto may render action invalid or nullity. In contradistinction thereto failure to obey directory

provision or its disobedience would not render the action a nullity. Another way to examine this distinction is that even non-compliance is capable of being waived and consequences thereof. The Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of *State of U.P. v. Baburam Upadhyay*, AIR 1961 SC 751, culled out the criteria for deciding *inter alia* whether a statutory provision is to be taken as mandatory or directory. They are:-

- (a) "the nature and the design of the statute, and
- (b) the consequences which follow from construing it the one way or the other,
- (c) the impact of other provisions whereby the necessity of complying with the provisions in question is avoided, the circumstance, namely, that the statute provides for a contingency of the non-compliance with the provisions,
- (d) the fact that the non-compliance with the provisions is or is not visited by some penalty, the serious or trivial consequences that flow therefrom, and,
- (e) above all, whether the object of the legislation will be defeated or furthered."

109. However, subsequently, the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of *May George v. Special Tahsildar*, (2010) 13 SCC 98, expanded these principles and added the following:

- (a) While determining whether a provision is mandatory or directory, somewhat on similar lines as afore-noticed, the Court has to examine the context in which the provision is used and the purpose it seeks to achieve;
- (b) To find out the intent of the legislature, it may also be necessary to examine serious general inconveniences or injustices which may be caused to persons affected by the application of such provision;
- (c) Whether the provisions are enabling the State to do some things and/or whether they prescribe the methodology or formalities for doing certain things;
- (d) As a factor to determine legislative intent, the court may also consider, *inter alia*, the nature and design of the statute and the consequences which would flow from construing it, one way or the other;

(e) It is also permissible to examine the impact of other provisions in the same statute and the consequences of non-compliance of such provisions;

(f) Physiology of the provisions is not by itself a determinative factor. The use of the words 'shall' or 'may', respectively would ordinarily indicate imperative or directory character, but not always.

(g) The test to be applied is whether non-compliance with the provision would render the entire proceedings invalid or not.

(h) The Court has to give due weight age to whether the interpretation intended to be given by the Court would further the purpose of law or if this purpose could be defeated by terming it mandatory or otherwise.

110. Sutherland *Statutory Construction*, Rev. Third Edn., 1943 (pg 640), mentions that “no statutory provisions are intended by the legislature to be disregarded”. Therefore, each word in a statute has a referral meaning and it must be given its true interpretation and import.

111. In terms of interpretation of statutes, question whether a particular provision is mandatory or directory and the distinction between the two arises when a statute uses a language which imposes a duty and where a breach of that requirement renders an action void. In general parlance, in case of mandatory provisions, the act done in breach of the duty imposed is void, while in case of directory provision act done does not become void (although some other consequences may follow). [*Rani Drigraj Kuer v. Raja Amar Krishna Narain Singh*, AIR 1960 SC 444].

112. In an often quoted passage LORD CAMPBELL said, “no universal rule can be laid down as to whether mandatory enactments shall be considered directory only or obligatory with an implied nullification for disobedience. It is the duty of courts of justice to try to get at the real intention of the legislature by

carefully attending to the whole scope of the statute to be considered [Craies on Statute Law, 5th edition, at p. 242 and quoted in *Liverpool Borough Bank v. Turner*, (1861) 30 LJ Ch 379].

This view came to be approved by the Supreme Court in the case of *State of UP v. Manbodhan Lal Shrivastava*, AIR 1957 SC 912, wherein the court quoted Crawford on 'Statutory Construction' - art. 261 at p. 516, "The question as to whether a statute is mandatory or directory depends upon the intent of the legislature and not upon the language in which the intent is clothed. The meaning and intention of the legislature must govern, and these are to be ascertained, not only from the phraseology of the provision, but also by considering its nature, its design, and the consequences which would follow from construing it the one way or the other...."

Maxwell on Interpretation of Statutes quotes Lord Penzance in the case of *Howard v. Bodington*, (1877) 2 P.D. 203 (211) – "I believe, as far as any rule is concerned, you cannot safely go further than that in each case you must look into the subject matter; consider the importance of the provision that has been disregarded and the relation of that provision to the general object intended to be secured by the Act; and upon a review of the case in that aspect decide whether the matter is what is called imperative or only directory."

113. If object of the enactment will be defeated by holding the same directory, it will be construed as mandatory whereas if by holding it mandatory, serious general inconvenience will be created to innocent persons without very much furthering the object of the

enactment, the same will be construed as directory [Delhi Airtech Services Pvt. Ltd. and Anr. v. State of U.P. and Anr. (2011) 9 SCC 354].

114. In Re: Presidential Poll case [AIR 1974 SC 1682], the Seven Judge Bench of the Hon'ble Supreme Court observed:

“13. In determining the question whether a provision is mandatory or directory, the subject matter, the importance of the provision, the relation of that provision to the general object intended to be secured by the Act will decide whether the provision is directory or mandatory. It is the duty of the courts to get at the real intention of the legislature by carefully attending the whole scope of the provision to be construed. The key to the opening of every law is the reason and spirit of the law, it is the *animus impotentia*, the intention of the law maker expressed in the law itself, taken as a whole.”

115. In the case of welfare statutes, the general rule of interpretation is that provisions should get that interpretation which would achieve the object of the enactment. Such statutes are to receive liberal construction but the same could not to be extended beyond the statutory scheme [*Ponni Sugars and Chemicals Ltd. v. Cauvery Sugar and Chemicals Ltd*, 2001 (2) MLJ 832; *Maruti Udyog Ltd. v. Ram Lal*, 2005 (2) SCC 638; *National Insurance Company Ltd. v. Arumugham*, 2006 (2) MLJ 564]. It is also a settled law that interpretation of a statute depends upon the text and the context thereof and the object with which the statute was made [*Pratap Singh v. State of Jharkhand*, (2005) 3 SCC 551].

116. In light of the above stated principles, now, we may examine the provisions of the Act of 1986 and the Notification of 2006. The Act of 1986 has been enacted for the protection and improvement of environment and the prevention of hazard to human beings, other

living creatures, plants and property. In light of the fact that the Article 21 of the Constitution of India includes the right to decent and clean environment, any of the provisions of the Act of 1986, in relation thereof, are a mandate of the Legislature. They do not provide discretion to a person to obey or not to obey the law and does not in any way permit dilution of the prescribed standards which are required to be adhered to by the person, who wishes to carry on any project or activity of any nature in the notified areas. The Notification of 2006 has been enacted to carry on the object and purpose of Act of 1986 effectively. The Notification as already noticed, applies not only to new projects but also to projects which propose to expand or even modernize the existing projects and are required to strictly comply with the environment standards prescribed under the Act of 1986 and the notification of 2006. We have also noticed above that the expression 'prior' appears as many as 40 times in the Notification of 2006. The expression 'shall' appears in all the relevant clauses where the Project Proponent is required to make the application and follow the prescribed procedure to obtain the Environmental Clearance prior to the commencement of any constructions work or preparation of land, except for securing the land.

117. The Notification of 2006 not only mandates an Applicant or Project Proponent to strictly comply with the provisions, but even requires the authorities to perform their prescribed functions and thus comply with the provisions within the time stipulated under those paragraphs of the Notification of 2006. It furthermore

provides the consequences of non-compliance by the authorities within the period statutorily prescribed. In terms of Para 3, it is not only the consequences of failure to comply on the part of the authorities that are prescribed, but it even specifies the rights that accrue to the Project Proponent. These private rights are definite in character and are of serious consequences. The required compliance has been stated with exactitude in the Notification of 2006, which provides a schedule stating category-wise those projects which require an Environmental Clearance and even the Form which a Project Proponent is required to furnish with complete details at the time of applying for Environmental Clearance.

118. If the application is not in Form 1 and does not provide complete details and documentation in support thereof in terms of the Schedule to the Notification of 2006, the authorities have the right to decline to entertain such an application.

119. Sections 3 and 5 of the Act of 1986 empowers the Central Government to take measures to protect and improve the environment and to issue directions of very wide magnitude, including directions in relation to closure, prohibition or regulation of any industry, operation or process. It can in all event also direct disconnection of electricity or water supply of such industry or operation or process. In exercise of its powers under Sections 6 and 25 of the 1986 Act, the Central Government has framed the Rules of 1986. The Notification of 2006 has been issued in terms of Rule 3(2) of the Act of 1986 as well as Rule 5(3) of the Rules of 1986. In

other words, these later enactments are integral part of the Act of 1986, their character being statutory and language of these provisions makes it obligatory upon every Project Proponent to obtain Environmental Clearance and comply with other environmental laws without default. Section 15 of the Act of 1986 provides penalty for contravention of the provisions of the Act of 1986, the Rules, orders and the directions passed thereunder. Interestingly, Section 15 of the Act of 1986 makes both non-compliance and contravention of the provisions of these enactments punishable. In other words, every default or violation and even non-compliance of the provisions has been made punishable. This necessarily implies the mandatory character of these provisions and statutory obligation on the part of the Project Proponent to comply with them.

120. We are unable to find any merit in the contention raised on behalf of the Project Proponent that the provisions of the Notification of 2006 are procedural. In our considered opinion, the provisions of this enactment are substantive and mandatory. These provisions do not admit of any substantial non-compliance or vest discretion with the authorities in relation to procedure prescribed under the Notification. They are couched in a language that is purely mandatory in character and is founded on the Precautionary Principle which is one of the statutory principles to be applied by the Tribunal in terms of Section 20 of the Act of 2010. If compliance is not made to the provisions of these enactments, it will totally frustrate the Precautionary Principle and thus the precautionary

principle can adversely impact the environment, protection of which is the sole object of the Act of 1986.

Thus, in view of the above discussion, it is clear that the requirements of the Notification of 2006 are mandatory in character. Their default or non-compliance is liable to be punished. The intention of the Legislature is to protect the environment for which words of specific nature like 'prior' and 'shall' have been used. The impact of non-compliance of these provisions would be of serious consequence, not only on environment but upon the society at large. All these enactments are unambiguous and framed in no uncertain terms and this conveys that projects commenced without obtaining Environmental Clearance would invite the penalty postulated under the Act of 1986.

Thus, we have no hesitation in holding that the provisions of Notification 2006 are mandatory and not procedural *simplicitor*.

Discussion on Issue No. 6

6. What is the status of structures raised by and conduct of the private Respondents and its effect upon the statutory provisions relating to environment?

121. The Applicants have contended that all the Project Proponents, (private Respondents) have violated the law and their acts before the statutory authorities and even before the Tribunal are full of falsehood i.e. *falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus*. It is their case that the private Respondents under the garb of a *bona fide* belief that Environmental Clearance is to be obtained before obtaining the Completion Certificate, have in fact, camouflaged compliance to the entire requirements of environmental laws. They, in fact, have

frustrated the very object and purpose of the Act of 1986, Rules of 1986 and the Notification of 2006. These Respondents, because of their illegal and unauthorised actions and activities undoubtedly and in fact undisputedly, have commenced construction activities and even completed substantial section of their projects, even prior to submitting their application seeking Environmental Clearance to SEIAA. What was required was that all these private Respondents must have first obtained Environmental Clearance prior to commencement of any construction activity at the site in question. As already noticed, the Notification of 2006 contemplates submission of various analysis data at a stage prior to commencement of any construction or activity of the project for which application is moved. When, these Respondents submitted applications for grant of Environmental Clearance, the competent authorities while acknowledging the receipt thereof had clearly commanded them not to continue with any construction activity unless the Environmental Clearance was granted. They had also called upon them to submit an undertaking to the respective authorities that they would not carry on any construction activity, which in fact they did. Despite, the above instructions, they continued the construction activity in an illegal and unauthorised way. The continuance of construction activity which was commenced thereto was itself illegal, constructed in totally unauthorised manner and was in complete violation of law. They failed to comply with the law at the threshold and violated the rules, the directions issued by the authorities at subsequent stages and

their own undertakings. Consequently, they have not only rendered themselves liable for the penal action as contemplated under Section 15 of the Act of 1986 but even the constructions raised by them are in total violation of the laws in force. Now, we may look at the stages of construction and the apparent violation by different Project Proponents and their present status. In the case of Mr. Y. Pondurai (Respondent No.3), the construction of the project started without even applying for grant of Environmental Clearance. The Project Proponent started the work of construction in full swing merely after getting the approval from the Government Housing and Urban Development Department of the State of Tamil Nadu in the year 2013. This Project Proponent submitted an application to SEIAA only on 21st February, 2014 and in the meanwhile continued with construction of the project despite a clear direction from the authorities as well as his own undertaking that he would not carry out any construction till the grant of Environmental Clearance. A Letter of Apology was also submitted by the Project Proponent on 21st March, 2014 and even then the Project Proponent continued with construction and raised substantial construction. A Show Cause Notice was issued to the Project Proponent by the TNPCB on 12th July, 2014 for carrying out construction work without obtaining Environmental Clearance. Again on 26th November, 2014, SEIAA informed Project Proponent not to continue the construction until Environment Clearance is obtained. Despite this, upon inspection of the site by TNPCB on 2nd April, 2015, it was noticed that construction work of 9 floors was over and interior works is

under progress. For its repeated violation, TNPCB issued a Stop Work Notice to Project Proponent on 4th April, 2015 as construction activities were continuing without obtaining EC. The Project Proponent had again assured the authorities that he was not carrying on any construction activity. However, when on 14th April, 2015, SEIAA inspected the work site, it was noticed that civil works of all blocks was completed and no work was being carried out at the time of inspection. This project is a commercial complex consisting construction of a main block – 2 basement + Ground floor + 10 floors; Service Block – Basement – Ground Floor + 2 floors and MLCP Block – 2 basement + Ground Floor + 4 Floors. On careful analysis of above two inspection reports it becomes clear that one floor was constructed by Project Proponent even after 2nd April, 2015, i.e. even after furnishing the above undertaking and issuance of Stop Work Notice. The photographs that were filed by the Project Proponent at the time of submission of applications itself show that the construction work was not completed and it was only in progress, in fact, large construction work remained to be completed. However, when the site in question was inspected by officers of TNPCB and SEIAA on 2nd April, 2015, it came to notice that not only the entire construction work had been completed but even the finishing work of the building has also been completed. Furthermore, comparing the photographs taken on both these different occasions clearly demonstrate that the Project Proponent has raised the construction by violating the law, his own undertaking, apology letter and direction of the authorities

concerned and have even completed the entire construction of the project. This construction is clearly illegal and unauthorised in the eyes of law. Cases of all the other Respondents are also on the similar lines. We have discussed them in detail in paragraphs 14 to 43 of the Judgment. As such, there is no need for repeating those facts.

122. What we need to notice here is that the compliance to the laws in force, submission of applications for grant of Environmental Clearance complete in all respects with necessary documents are the conditions precedent of consideration of such application by the competent authorities. It is imperative that the activity for which the Environmental Clearance is sought must be an activity started completely in consonance with law. Even the approval of the drawings and principal approval of the construction of the project from CMDA was subject to compliance with the laws in force. We do not agree to the argument propounded by the Project Proponents that the grant of principal approval *ipso facto* had the effect of granting other permissions to start construction without complying with other laws and permissions from the other authorities, particularly in face of the fact that a clause of this principal approval required the Project Proponent to obtain Environmental Clearance. All these Project Proponents are deemed to be in knowledge of the laws relating to construction of such projects i.e. Act of 1986, Rules of 1986 and Notification of 2006. The Project Proponents are persons in the business of building projects, having huge means and perspicacity. They cannot be even expected to take

up the plea that they were not aware of the provisions of environmental laws. It is in fact unfortunate that these Project Proponents have not only violated the laws and their own undertaking but in that process even made other innocent people invest their money into the project, being fully aware that the construction raised is completely illegal and unauthorised. The Constructions have been raised in complete and flagrant violation of law. This renders them liable to be prosecuted against in terms of Section 15 of the Act of 1986. The authorities have taken action against some of them, but that does not in any way by necessary implication or otherwise have the effect of regularising the construction that has been raised illegally, in an unauthorised manner and in violation of the principles of law. We must notice that these constructions are bound to have adverse effect on environment, ecology and biodiversity in the areas where they are located. Some of the environmental degradation and deterioration would be irreversible while other would be correctable to some extent either by demolition or by taking curative measures which we will hereafter discuss. Their illegal acts and unacceptable conduct has even rendered compliance to the provisions of the Notification of 2006 impracticable if not impossible.

123. Another plea advanced on behalf of the Applicants before the Tribunal is that the Office Memoranda are clearly in derogation and not in support of the substantive law, the attempt to condone violation would lead to compounding of offences and permitting what provisions of Notification of 2006 and Act of 1986 restricts.

The legislature in its wisdom has statutorily introduced the Precautionary Principle in terms of section 20 of the NGT Act, effect of which would stand wiped out in substance by these Office Memoranda. The contention of the Applicants is that the Office Memoranda are neither remedial nor solution to a problem. It is not one time settlement for the category of the persons who might have under some bonafide impression or mistake commenced the activity of the project without obtaining environmental clearance. Office Memoranda in their operation and effect are continuous and do not propose to cover a given situation. The Office Memoranda were issued right from the year 2010 and were amended from time to time, lastly in 2013. The Office Memorandum of 27th June, 2013 *ex facie* is a law in itself as it operates as the procedure for all future times giving substantive rights to parties and runs contra to the statutory provision and procedure established under substantive law. On the plain reading of the Notification of 2006, it is manifestly clear that it is the procedure prescribed therein besides being mandatory in character is also *sui-generis*. Once the law prescribes things to be done in a particular way then they must be done in that way alone or not at all. In *Barium Chemicals Ltd. v. Company Law Board*, AIR 1967 SC 295, the Hon'ble Supreme Court held "As a general rule, if the, statute directs that certain acts shall be done in a specified manner or by certain persons, their performance in any other manner than that specified or by any other person than one of those named is impliedly prohibited."

124. From such matters or procedure to be performed differently the law must specifically contemplate that it is impermissible to draw such inferences by implication. Nothing has been brought to our notice neither in the Act of 1986, Rules of 1986 and the Notification of 2006 which in express terms or even by necessary implications permits the mandated provisions to be waived and in any case in the manner that would not prejudicially effect the environment and ecology.

125. On behalf of some of the Project Proponents, another argument is advanced to contend that the various authorities understood or interpreted the law to suggest that obtaining of Environmental Clearance prior commencement of project activity was not a condition precedent. The planning permission granted to the Project Proponents also contemplated that Environmental Clearance should be obtained by these Respondents prior to issuance of completion certificate. These Office Memoranda are therefore by themselves and on interpretation of law with the aid of doctrine of *contemporanea expositio* would operate in favour of the Project Proponents for continuing default, if any, on their part. The Project Proponents have relied upon the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in *K.P. Vargheese v Income Tax Officer & Ors., Ernakulam* 1981 4 SCC 173 in support of their contentions.

126. We are unable to find any merit in these submissions. The doctrine means that a construction which has been long adopted and publically acted upon will not be lightly disturbed by the courts.

127. The rationale behind the same is that judges who lived at/or about that time when the statutes were made, were best able to judge intentions of the makers at that time but where the wording of the statutes are plain, then its *contemporanea* interpretation cannot override the plain meaning of the words used in the statutes. The Courts do not apply this doctrine where the statute is comparatively modern. The Doctrine historically is founded on the principles that have been evolved by interpretation of ancient statutes or other documents that it has received from the *contemporanea* authority. The meaning publically given by the *contemporanea* or local usage is presumed to be true one even where the language has terminological or popularly a different meaning. It is obvious that the language of the statues must be understood in the sense in which it was understood when it was passed. (Ref: Interpretation of Statutes by P.M. Bakshi, 2013 Reprint edition and Maxwell on Interpretation of Statues 2013, 19th Impression)

128. *Contemporanea expositio* as a rule for interpretation, cannot aid where there is no question of interpretation or giving a meaning to the language of a provision is concerned. It cannot be called in aid where an Office Memorandum creates a new procedure or parallel law in conflict with the substantive law. This Doctrine applies only to the construction of ambiguous language in the other statutes where one thing to take recourse to the practice and meaning given to the provisions generally and/or very particularly by the temporary authorities. In the case of *K.P. Verghese v. Income*

Tax Officer, Ernakulam (supra), the Hon'ble Supreme Court held that "it will settle that meaning prescribed by the authorities showing the notification is good guide to *Contemporian expositio* of the position of law." For application of this doctrine the meaning of statute has to be in doubt. If the language of the provisions admit of no ambiguity or doubt, the question of resorting to this doctrine would hardly arise. In our considered view, the Notification of 2006, does not admit of any ambiguity or doubt. We have already in some elaboration dealt with the provisions of the notification of 2006 that clearly contemplates obtaining of prior Environmental Clearance before commencement of any activity of the project. The Office Memoranda have the effect of wiping out the 40-times used expression, 'prior Environmental Clearance' in the Notification of 2006 and the very purpose of this Notification to protect the environment. The contention of the Project Proponents that impugned Orders are clarificatory in providing what the Notification of 2006 lacks or does not provide for and that the intention behind the issuance of Office Memoranda, is to remove the ambiguity or to provide resolution to the difficulties faced in implementing the Notification of 2006, does not have any merit, as even the stand of all the authorities i.e. MoEF, SEIAA and Pollution Control Board is that prior grant of Environmental Clearance before commencement of the project activity is mandated by the Notification. Particularly, author of the Office Memoranda in its affidavit has averred '*it is true that neither the act nor the EIA Notification, 2006 grant any relaxation on the requirements of the obtaining of prior Environmental*

Clearance before any construction work is commenced or any project scheduled therein.....'. This is also completely substantiated by the opening language of the impugned Office Memoranda where it is said that it was obligatory upon the Project Proponents to obtain prior Environmental Clearance. SEIAA had categorically proscribed the Project Proponents from carrying on any construction activity till Environmental Clearance was granted and had asked them not to repeat the violation. This being the stand of the authorities, the impugned Office Memoranda do not clarify any linguistic or interpreted doubt in the notification 2006 and Act of 1986 but establish a new procedure contrary to the substantive law. It is abundantly clear that principle of *contemporanea expositio* cannot be said to have universal application, each case must be considered on its own facts and executive instruction is entitled to respect but it is not beyond the pale of judicial review. One of the examples cited more often than not is that rules made under the statutes are legitimate aid to the construction of statutes as *contemporanea expositio*. Such Office Memoranda which create a substantive right and obligation by themselves which patently are contrary to the substantive law cannot even be otherwise legitimized with the aid of this doctrine. The fundamental principle of construction is that rules made or directions issued under the statutes must be treated as exactly as if they were in the Act and are of the same effect as it contained in the Act, they cannot be contrary to the fundamental provisions of a statutory notification. Another settled norm is that maxim and precedents are not to be applied mechanically and they

are of assistance only in so far as they furnish guidance by compendiously summing up principles based on the rules of common sense and logic (Ref: *Rohit Pulp and Paper Mills Ltd. v. Collector of Central Excise, Baroda*, AIR 1991 SC 754).

In our considered opinion the Project Proponents cannot derive any benefit or advance its case with reference to doctrine of *contemporanea expositio*.

129. Equally, without merit is the other limb of the contention raised on behalf of the Project Proponents. The authorities issuing the planning permission to the Project Proponents had required the Project Proponents to obtain environmental clearance prior to the grant of completion certificate by the said authority. With reference to this term, the contention is that the Project Proponents were under a *bonafide* belief that they could start the construction without obtaining the Environmental Clearance which they were expected to obtain prior to grant of completion certificate only. This submission is fallacious at the face of it. Every person is expected to know the law. Ignorance of law cannot be a plea. The Project Proponents are not persons who can be presumed to be in ignorant of law, they are into this business for years and the Notification of 2006 came into the existence in the year 2006. All the projects in question commenced in the year 2010 and subsequent thereto. The mandatory character of the notification of 2006 obliged the Project Proponents of any project or activity to obtain prior Environmental Clearance before starting construction. They not only failed to do so but even started huge construction and moved the applications for

grant of Environmental Clearance at much subsequent stage. The terms and conditions of the planning permissions required the Project Proponents to comply with all the requirements of law including obtaining of Environmental Clearance for their respective projects. The terms and conditions of the planning permission clearly postulated that they would not even be granted completion certificate if they had not obtained the Environmental Clearance. Reading of the clause of the planning permission by the Project Proponents to take advantage of it is blatantly contrary to the very purpose of the said condition. The terms and conditions of the planning permissions are firstly to be read together, and secondly no document of this nature can be read to construe that it intends to cause waiver of any other requirement of law. All laws are to operate in their respective fields for obtaining the object of rule of law and not in favour of avoidance or dis-obedience to other laws in force. Therefore, we find no merit even in this submission of the Project Proponents.

Discussion on Issue No. 7:

7. The environmental impacts of the projects in question upon environment, ecology and biodiversity.

130. We have already held that comprehensive and definite compliance to the provisions of the Notification of 2006 have been made redundant by the unauthorised actions of the private Respondents as well as by the impugned Office Memoranda issued by the MoEF. Collection of certain data, scientific analysis, pre-construction environmental impacts of the project and other information which are pre-requisite for the submission of the

application in Form 1 or supplementary Form I-A of the Appendix II under the Notification of 2006, can neither be collected nor be provided as the projects have already come up substantially or otherwise have completed construction work extensively. Not only the environmental impacts of the projects cannot be examined fairly but even the matters like site selection and public hearing cannot be deliberated upon, thus frustrating the very object of public hearing. The provisions of the Act of 1986, Rules of 1986 and the Notification of 2006 are statutory documents having the force of law. Providing a mechanism in exercise of administrative or executive power in complete deviation or disregard to the law in force, would be contrary to the basic rule of law. Besides it being in derogation to the environmental jurisprudence, it would also have adverse impacts upon environment and ecology of the area. There is greater need for compliance to the statutory provisions. Such compliance would be essential in the interest of the environment. Therefore, we have to examine the various aspects of such non-compliance law and if there can be any tolerance to the breach of the statutory provisions. If so, its extent and impacts on matters of technical and environmental significance that would flow from such breaches or defaults. Let us now examine the requirements of law with reference to environment.

131. In recent past, building construction activities in our country have been carried out without much attention to environmental issues and this has caused tremendous pressure on various finite natural resources. The green cover, water bodies and ground water

resources have been forced to give way to the rapid construction activities. Modern buildings generally have high levels of energy consumption because of requirements of air-conditioning and lighting in addition to water consumption. In this scenario, it is necessary to critically assess the utilization of natural resources in these activities.

132. An application seeking prior Environmental Clearance for building construction project is required to be made in the prescribed Form 1 and supplementary Form 1A, after the identification of prospective site for the project to which the application relates, before commencing any construction activity or preparation of land, at the site by the Applicant. The Applicant is required to submit along with the application, in addition to Form 1 and the supplementary Form 1A, a copy of the conceptual plan of the project.

133. Apart from profile of the Project Proponent, name and contact address, implementing organization, organizational chart, project consultants etc., are to be mentioned clearly. After providing details of land (plot/ survey numbers, village, tehsil, district, state and area of the land), goal and objectives of the proposed project, significance of the project both at local and regional level, relevance of the project in light of the existing developmental plans of the region are required to be mentioned. Background information and overall scenario of the proposed activity in the Indian context, procedures adopted for selection, criteria for selection of the site for the proposed activity, such as environmental, socio-economic,

minimization of impacts, ecological sensitivity, impact of existing activities on the proposed activity, etc. is required to be spelt out. Resources and manpower requirements have to be detailed apart from time frame for project initiation, implementation and completion in following manner:

- Total site area
- Total built up area (provide area details) and total activity area
- Source of water and consumption
- Source of power and requirement
- Connectivity to the city centre, utilities and transportation networks community facilities
- Parking requirements
- Type of building material to be used
- Environmental liability of the site
- Existing structure / type of material – demolition debris, etc.

134. A map of the study area showing 500 meters from the boundary of the project area, delineating the major topographical features such as land use, drainage, location of habitats, major constructions including roads, railways, pipelines, and industries, if any in the area is required to be enclosed. A map covering aerial distance of 15 km from the boundary of the proposed project area delineating environmentally sensitive areas as specified in Form I of the Notification of 2006 is also to be annexed. In the same map, the details of environmentally sensitive areas present within a radial distance of 1 km from the project boundary are to be specifically

shown. Land use map of the study area is also required to be furnished.

135. Based on the examination of the relevant details, project specific Terms of Reference (TOR) are provided for the EIA studies. While awarding TOR for EIA studies, the points that are of concern include:

- a. Likely alterations to the existing land use of the area;
- b. Impact on the geomorphology vis-à-vis land disturbance resulting in soil erosion, subsidence & instability of the area;
- c. Impact on the natural drainage systems, including wetlands;
- d. Impact of the land use changes occurring due to the proposed project on the runoff characteristics vis-à-vis flooding or water logging of the area
- e. Impacts of the proposed project on the ground water vis-à-vis pollution of land & aquifers;
- f. Likely threats to the biodiversity, especially vegetation pattern and displacement of terrestrial and aquatic fauna;
- g. Impact on the atmospheric concentration of gases and generation of dust, smoke, odorous fumes or other hazardous gases;
- h. Likely impact on the transport system in the area, including the parking space for vehicles;
- i. Impact on the noise levels and vibrations in the area;

j. Likely impact on the social structure of local communities, and likely disturbance to sacred sites or other cultural values.

136. It may be kept in mind that, prior to the grant of EC, concept of sustainable development and precautionary principles were the leading factors governing the environmental jurisprudence. The application of these Principles assumes that the impacts of any development on the environment and human health are difficult to predict with certainty, therefore, prudence requires that before embarking on the development project, we explore the possible alternatives to the project. Needless to say that exploring alternatives also includes exploring all the harmful actions which the project may cause, including such damages which may be completely irreversible. Equally important component of these Principles is, to place the burden of proof on the Project Proponents to highlight that the impact of the activity on the environment and the health of the people would be minimal and/or all precautionary measures have been adopted. While exploring alternatives with regard to siting the project and the technology of the project, exploring alternatives also includes “not taking up of the project as one of the alternatives”.

137. The very purpose of awarding project specific TOR for EIA studies is that it is expected that the report furnishes balanced and credible information for environmental safeguard apart from other essential environmental studies and most importantly contains the

appropriate environmental management plan/s along with budgetary provisions that form integral part of the project cost.

138. This EIA report is subjected to appraisal by the Experts, prior to the grant of Environmental Clearance depending upon the nature and location specificity of the project. TOR assists the EIA consultant, prior to execution of project, to prepare an effective and user friendly report with relevant project specific data, which are easily implementable.

139. A typical EIA report, as per Environmental Impact Assessment Guidance Manual for Building, Construction, Townships and Area Development Project of MoEF, 2010, includes:

1. Description of the project site, geology, topography, climate, transport and connectivity, demographic aspects, socio, cultural and economic aspects, villages, settlements are also to be given. Historical data on climate conditions such as wind pattern, history of cyclones, storm surges, earth quake etc., is also looked into. Detailed layout plan of proposed project development, communication facilities, access/approach roads, landscape, sewage disposal facilities, and waste disposal etc. is also given. Layout plan for proposed development of built up areas with covered construction such as DG Set rooms, Administrative buildings, Utilities such as Main and Stand-by Power, Water supply installations etc. is furnished. Most importantly, requirement of natural resources and their sources are to be detailed out.

2. The environmental impacts of construction and operation are established during the early phases of site selection and planning. Planning, site selection and design form an important stage in the development of these projects and will determine their environmental impact(s). Environmental data to be considered in relation to such development pertaining to (a) land (b) ground water, surface water (c) air (d) biological environment (e) noise (f) socio economic environment. The first feature which influences the development of a new project is the existing land use pattern of the neighbourhood of the project, whether the proposed development conforms to the development for that area or not. Study of land use pattern, habitation, cropping pattern, forest cover, environmentally sensitive places etc., provides the first insight to the likely impacts of the project. Geographical latitude and microclimatic factors such as solar access and wind loads also have major impact.
3. Identification of Project activities, including construction phase, which may affect surface water or groundwater have a direct relation to the estimated water intake requirements and identification of the source of water to be used. Description of water availability and sourcing plays a critical role in impact assessment. Baseline water quality from all sources such as ground water or municipal supply or surface water helps in proper assessment.

4. Climatological data, air and noise level pollution similarly plays an important role in assessing the likely environmental impacts and requires anti-pollution measures to be adopted.
5. Baseline information on the flora and fauna of the study area along with a description of the existing terrestrial, wetland and aquatic vegetation determines the environmental sensitivity and the need for environmental protection measures.
6. Details of solid wastes from construction sector can be categorized into two phases i.e. during construction & during operation. Details of the construction or demolition waste, i.e., massive and inert waste; Municipal waste, i.e., biodegradable and recyclable waste and hazardous & e-waste provide steps that are required to be adopted for its management.
7. Main anticipated impacts from building construction, which need to be addressed, are
 - Impact on the natural drainage system and soil erosion.
 - Loss of productive soil and impact on natural drainage pattern.
 - Study of the problem of landslides and assessment of soil erosion potential
 - Impact on air and noise quality during the construction and operation phase - the existing surrounding features of the study area and impact on them from various sources such as machinery, transportation, etc.

- Impact of construction and operational phases on the surface and ground water on account of the building construction
 - Waste water generation its treatment and utilization
 - Impact of project during construction and operational phases on the biological environment
 - Predicted impact on the communities
 - Impact of the project during construction and operational phases for generation of waste
 - Energy requirements and infrastructure requirements needed for the activity
 - Steps to be taken to integrate the needs of other stakeholders into the location and design of access infrastructure, to reduce and manage overall environmental impacts
8. Another important consideration pertains to requirements of building construction material and technologies to be used. Any project with proper TOR and EIA report would provide details of:
- Types of materials used in each component part of the building and landscape (envelope, superstructure, openings, roads and surrounding landscape)
 - Plans and sections of buildings showing use of new technologies and nonconventional methods
 - Plans and sections of building using new construction techniques

9. Similarly, it will also deal with energy conservation aspects in terms of:

- Use of alternate renewable resources such as solar / wind power etc.
- Options considered for supplying the power required for the Project and the environmental implications, including opportunities to increase the energy efficiency of the Project
- Details of U & R values
- Details of the renewable energy systems (sizing and design), building costs and integration

140. It is reported that approximately 50 percent of the energy use in buildings is devoted for producing an artificial indoor climate through heating, cooling, ventilation, and lighting. Water conservation and efficiency programs have begun to lead to substantial decrease in the use of water within buildings. Studies have shown that water-efficient appliances and fixtures can reduce consumption by up to 30 percent or more. As demand of water increases with urban growth, the economic impact of water conservation and efficiency will increase proportionately. Water efficiency not only can lead to substantial water savings, but it can also reduce the requirement for expansion of water treatment facilities. The building industry is slowly beginning to recycle its waste but there is a need to achieve significant waste reductions through more reuse of building material and adaptation, as opposed to demolition. Conventional buildings often fail to consider

the interrelationship among building site, design elements, energy and resource constraints, building systems, and building function. Green buildings, through an integrated design approach, take into consideration the effect these factors have on one another. Climate and building orientation, design factors such as day lighting opportunities, and building envelope and system choices, as well as economic guidelines and occupant activities, are all factors that need to be considered in an integrated approach. Application of new building concepts can yield for savings during the construction process. Measures that are relatively easy to implement can result in savings to natural resources in the following areas:

- Lower energy costs, by monitoring usage, installing energy-efficient lamps and fixtures, and using occupancy sensors to control lighting fixtures;
- Lower water costs, by monitoring consumption and reusing storm water and/or construction waste-water where possible;
- Lower site-clearing costs, by minimizing site disruption and movement of earth and installation of artificial systems;
- Lower landfill dumping fees and associated hauling charges, through reuse and recycling of construction and demolition debris;
- Lower materials costs, with more careful purchase and reuse of resources and materials;
- Possible earnings from sale of reusable items removed during building demolition.

141. Therefore, any project with proper filling of Form I would be awarded TOR specific to the project and thereby would have EIA report that deals with environmental concerns specific to the project prior to its execution along with the necessary management plan/s and budgetary provisions.

142. In view of the above, if the project execution is carried out at any stage prior to grant of EC, it would be detrimental to the environment as at the very outset even primary baseline information for filling up Form 1 and Form 1A would not be available for providing project specific TOR for the EIA studies and thus the EIA study would become irrelevant thereby making the appraisal of EIA report only a formality. In the whole process, even imposition of general and specific conditions in EC pertaining to construction phase of the project would be irrelevant. It is extremely important to note here that the major impacts of any building construction project (alteration to topography, water drawl, air pollution, etc.) are during the construction stage or are directly relatable to the construction of the project itself (provision of parking space, fire safety, rain water harvesting and recycling, storm water, construction methodology, enhancing energy efficiency, etc.). Lastly and most importantly, if the project layout plan requires certain changes in the layout plan on account of likely environmental concerns (such as fire safety, day lighting, seismic hazards, water conservation measures, number of basements, etc.), it would be practically impossible to do so.

143. The above discussion clearly demonstrates the intent of the framers of the law that the compliances under the Notification of 2006 will hardly have an application post-construction or after completion of projects or activities. The prescribed parameters, the documentation and data to be provided along with Form 1, in no uncertain terms oblige the Applicant not to commence any activity unless it has obtained the Environmental Clearance. The post-grant of Environmental Clearance will neither be in the interest of the environment nor would it serve the purpose of the Act of 1986 and/or the Notification of 2006. The primary data required to be submitted relates to pre-project situation and circumstances. Of course, it will also depend upon the nature of the project activity or development activity that the Project Proponent proposes to establish. The impact of building construction and the resultant concretization, particularly basement construction on the groundwater levels and flow directions can be a matter of serious concern. The manner in which the basements are being constructed, its impact on the groundwater table, in what manner how much groundwater is proposed to be extracted, would also be a relevant consideration. EIA Report prepared *ex-post-facto*, i.e. on completion of the project, would suffer from lack of due diligence and would foreclose the options for exploring alternatives. This will go against the fundamentals of the Precautionary Principle and Sustainable Development. Similarly, it will be very tedious and very difficult, if not impossible, to appropriately consider various components of the biodiversity at the site and alternative steps that

should be taken by the Project Proponent to protect any rare, endangered and threatened species at the site in question. In absence of such assessment, the opportunity of protecting the local ecology gets defeated and hence the goals of sustainable development. The cumulative effect of the above discussion would be that the illegal and indiscriminate development activity that has been carried out by the Project Proponents is bound to have serious impacts on environment, ecology and biodiversity and a very comprehensive and stringent study would be required to dilute or mitigate adverse environmental impacts of the projects in question.

Issue Nos. 8 and 9

- 8. What relief, if any, are any of the parties to the present proceedings entitled to?**
- 9. What directions, if any, need to be issued by this Tribunal in the peculiar facts and circumstances of the present case?**

144. In this main application, as well as in the applications filed on behalf of the Project Proponents/Respondents, we are concerned with the rival reliefs claimed by the respective parties. On the one hand, the Applicants pray for setting aside of the impugned Office Memoranda, issuance of directions to the Respondents to initiate prosecution and even to pass such other orders and directions as would be necessary for the facts and circumstances of the case. While on the other hand, the Project Proponents/Respondents pray for saving of the impugned Office Memoranda passed and constructions raised by them, as well as that delisting of their application by SEIAA was not called for and that SEIAA be directed

to consider their application on merits. It is also the contention of the Project Proponents that the relief claimed by them that they being mostly residential complexes are category 'B' projects and hence they are not required to obtain the Environmental Clearance. In view of the above discussion, we have answered the issues in favour of the Applicant and against the Respondents and having held that the Office Memoranda dated 12th December, 2012 and 27th June, 2013 are liable to be quashed, the Project Proponents through their own conduct, raising illegal and unauthorized constructions, without obtaining prior Environmental Clearance and having specifically violated the provisions of the Notification of 2006 and the directions issued to them by the authorities, are not entitled to any relief claimed by them.

145. After discussing the above mentioned issues we feel that still there are two questions remaining to be dealt with by the Tribunal. First, whether the Notification of 2006 applies to the residential complexes in terms of Schedule-I to the Notification of 2006. Secondly, the construction of the projects having been completed, where 3rd party interest have already been created, what are the appropriate directions that should be issued by the Tribunal in the interest of environment and ecology and for restoration and restitution of the same within the ambit and scope of Section 15 of the NGT Act, 2010.

146. The contention of some of the Project Proponents is that their projects are residential projects and therefore the Notification of 2006 is not applicable to them, thus, it is not necessary for them to

obtain Environmental Clearance. Some of them, particularly Respondent No. 9, has contended that these are category 'B' projects and therefore, no public consultation or EIA report is required. Therefore, their projects need to be cleared. The Applicants are developing multi-storey residential building. It is the case of this Project Proponent that the project does not fall within the ambit of Entry 8(a) and 8(b) of the Schedule of Notification of 2006. It only applies to industrial or commercial buildings. Furthermore, there is no valid basis for laying down the threshold limitation of 20,000 sq. mts in the Schedule. The reliance is placed upon the judgment of the Delhi High Court in the case of *Delhi Pollution Control Committee v. Splendor Landbase Ltd.*, LPA 895 of 2010 decided on 23rd January, 2012. While dealing with these contentions of private Respondents, we have already noticed that there is no specific challenge raised by these Respondents to the Notification of 2006. No such challenge was raised even during the course of the arguments. On the contrary, they have relied upon the impugned Memoranda issued in furtherance to the Notification of 2006.

147. The Notification of 2006 has a mandatory character and its requirements have to be satisfied in consonance with the provisions made therein. Prior Environmental Clearance from the regulatory authority is the condition precedent before any construction work or preparation of land by the Project Proponent is carried out except for securing the land. The project and activities as already stated above have been categorized into two categories; category 'A' and

category 'B'. All the projects and activities which have been specified in the Schedule to the Notification of 2006 required Environmental Clearance. In these cases, we are concerned with Entry 8(a) and 8(b) of the Schedule to the Notification that reads as follows:

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
"8		Building or Construction projects or Area Development projects and Townships.		
8(a)	Building and Construction projects		>20000 sq.mtrs and < 1,50,000 sq. mtrs. of built up area	<p>The term "built up area" for the purpose of this notification the built up or covered area on all floors put together, including its basement and other service areas, which are proposed in the building or construction projects.</p> <p>Note 1.- The projects or activities shall not include industrial shed, school, college, hostel for educational institution, but such buildings shall ensure sustainable environmental management, solid and liquid waste management, rain water harvesting and may use recycled materials such as fly ash bricks.</p> <p>Note 2.- "General Conditions" shall not apply.</p>
8(b)	Townships and Area Development Projects		Covering an area of > 50 ha and or built up area > 1,50,000 sq. mtrs.	<p>A project of Township and Area Development Projects covered under this item shall require an Environment Assessment report and be appraised as Category 'B1' Project.</p> <p>Note.- "General Conditions" shall not apply.</p>

148. The entry has been intentionally termed very widely by the framers. Any Building and Construction Project which has the built up area or covered area of more than 20,000 sq meters or less than 1,50,000 sq. meters would fall under Item 8(a) and Township and Area Development projects covering an area of more than 50 hectares and / or built up areas of more than 1,50,000 sq. meters would fall under Item 8(b). Both of these would be Category 'B' projects. These projects would be dealt with for grant or refusal of Environmental Clearance as per the procedure prescribed under the Notification of 2006. If we examine the scheme of the Notification of 2006 and its relevant provisions, particularly, Paragraphs 2, 6, 7 and 8, it is clear that the expression 'project and activity' are of very wide magnitude and would cover all kind of projects and activities. The definition of environment under Section 2(a) of the Act of 1986 read with definition of the same term under Section 2(c) of the NGT Act would clearly show that the 'projects' or 'activities' are not synonymous terms. What may not be covered specifically under the term 'project' may squarely fall within the ambit of 'activity'. These expressions, having not been specifically made exclusive, would be treated to be more generic and would apply to all kinds of projects and activities. Entry 8(a) talks of building and construction project only with reference to area and extent of construction. They do not even remotely suggest that such building or construction projects should be carried out for an industrial or any allied activity. Whether the complex is being constructed exclusively for residential purpose and/or for mixed use, it will not alter the situation, if

otherwise, it meets the threshold requirement of the area of construction. There is no occasion before the Tribunal to give undue narrow construction to these expressions which have been intentionally worded very widely by the framers of law. On the Rule of 'Plain Construction', these terms would include residential buildings or projects and the Notification of 2006 would be applicable to all the projects in question. The reliance placed by the private Respondents upon the judgment of the Delhi High Court in the case of *Delhi Pollution Control Committee* (supra), in our considered opinion, is misplaced. In that case, Delhi High Court was concerned with Section 25 of the Water Act. It is not necessary for us to discuss the judgment of High Court in any greater detail, primarily for two reasons, firstly, judgment relates to the provisions of the Water Act, in particular Section 25, the provisions of which are not *pari materia* to the provisions of the Act of 1986 and the Notification of 2006. These provisions are completely different from each other and have different parameters to satisfy. Second and most importantly, the High Court itself in paragraph 25 of the Judgment noticed that the reasoning given by the Learned Single Judge to expand the scope of Section 25(a) of the Water Act object of which was different, i.e., control of water pollution, in its wider magnitude, 'ignores' (emphasis supplied) that the Act of 1986 deals with this larger issue in the context of 'environment' which has been defined therein to include water, air, land and interrelationship which exists among them and human beings and other living creatures, plants, micro-organism and property. The

said Act of 1986 and Rules framed thereunder are wide enough to cover exploitation of water and the impact thereof on the environment. Then the Supreme Court proceeded to hold that the Water Act would not apply to building, housing and residential apartment units as they may not be discharging trade effluents covered under the provision of that Act.

149. It is also not necessary for us to deal with the applicability of the Water Act to such buildings, as that question does not arise before us, hence we leave the question open. However, we have no doubt in stating that the said judgment of the High Court is of no avail to the private Respondents in the present case.

150. A Bench of this Tribunal had the occasion to examine the scope of the Entries in the Schedule to the Notification of 2006 particularly, Entry 8(a), 8(b) and 7(f) in the case of *Vikrant Kumar Tongad v. Delhi Tourism and Transportation Corporation and Ors.*, 2015 ALL (I) NGT Reporter (1) (Delhi) 244, the Tribunal held as under:

“31. If an activity is allowed to go ahead, there may be irreparable damage to the environment and if it is stopped, there may be irreparable damage to economic interest. In case of doubt, however, protection of environment would have precedence over the economic interest. Precautionary principle requires anticipatory action to be taken to prevent harm. The harm can be prevented even on a reasonable suspicion. It is not always necessary that there should be direct evidence of harm to the environment [*Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum v. Union of India*, (1996) 5 SCC 647].

32. The applicability of ‘Principle of Liberal Construction’ to socio-welfare legislation like the Act of 1986, thus, could be justified either with reference to the ‘doctrine of reasonable construction’ and/or even on ‘constructive intuition’. In the case of *Haat Supreme Wastech Pvt. Ltd. v. State of Haryana and Ors*, 2013 ALL (I) NGT REPORTER (2) (DELHI) 140, the Tribunal,

while dealing with interpretation of the Regulations of 2006 along with the Schedule and while deciding whether the bio-medical waste disposal plants required Environmental Clearance or not, answered the question in affirmative, that, such plants are covered under Entry 7(d) and while answering so, applied the doctrine of 'reasonable construction' as well as 'constructive intuition'. Doctrine of 'reasonable construction' is intended to provide a balance between development and the environment. The Tribunal held that there was no occasion for the Tribunal to take the scope of Entry 7(d) as unduly restrictive or limited and it gave the entry a wide meaning. It was also held that the Environmental Clearance would help in ensuring a critical analysis of the suitability of the location of the bio-medical waste disposal plant and its surroundings and a more stringent observation of parameters and standards by the Project Proponent on the one hand and limiting its impact on public health on the other.

33. 'Development' with all its grammatical variations, means the carrying out of building, engineering, mining or other operations in, on, over or under land or the making of any material change in any building or land and includes re-development. It could also be an activity, action, or alteration that changes underdeveloped property into developed property (Ref: Wharton's Law Lexicon, 15th Edn., 2012, Black's Law Dictionary 9th Edn., 2009). Reading of Clause 2 of the Regulations of 2006 and the Schedule attached thereto, particularly in light of the above principles, clearly demonstrates that an expression of very wide magnitude has been deliberately used by the framers. They are intended to cover all projects and activities, in so far as they squarely fall within the ambit and scope of the Clause. There does not appear to be any interest for the Tribunal to give it a narrower or a restricted meaning or interpretation. In the case of *Kehar Singh v. State of Haryana*, 2013 ALL (I) NGT REPORTER (2) (DELHI) 140, the Tribunal had specifically held that there should exist a nexus between the act complained of and environment and that there could be departure from the rule of literal construction, so as to avoid the statute becoming meaningless or futile. In case of a social or beneficial legislation, the Tribunal should adopt a liberal or purposive construction as opposed to the rule of literal construction. The words used therein are required to be given a liberal and expanded meaning. The object and purpose of the Act of 1986 and the Schedule of Regulations of 2006 thereto was held to be of utmost relevance. In the case of present kind, if no checks and balances are provided and expert minds does not examine and assess the impacts

of such projects or activities relating to development, consequences can be very devastating, particularly environmentally. Normally, the damage done to environment and ecology is very difficult to be redeemed or remedied. Thus, a safer approach has to be adopted to subject such projects to examination by Expert Bodies, by giving wider meaning to the expressions used, rather than to frustrate the object and purpose of the Regulations of 2006, causing irretrievable ecological and environmental damage.

34. There can hardly be any escape from the fact that Entries 8(a) and 8(b) are worded somewhat ambiguously. They lack certainty and definiteness. This was also noticed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of *In Re: Construction of Park at Noida Near Okhla Bird Sanctuary v. Union of India (UOI) & Ors.*, (2011) 1 SCC 744, where the Court felt the need that the Entries could be described with greater precision and clarity and the definition of 'built-up area' with facilities open to the sky needs to be freed from its present ambiguity and vagueness. Despite the above judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, Entry 8(a) and 8(b) were neither amended nor altered to provide clarity or certainty. However, the expression 'built up area' under the head 'conditions if any' in column (5) of the Schedule to the Regulations of 2006, was amended vide Notification dated 4th April, 2011. *Dehors* the ambiguities in these Entries, an interpretation that would frustrate the object and implementation of the relevant laws, would not be permissible. 'Township and Area Development project' is an expression which would take within its ambit the projects which may be specific in relation to an activity or may be, they are general Area Development projects, which would include construction and allied activities. 'Area Development' project is distinct from 'Building and Construction' project, which by its very language, is specific and distinct. Entries 8(a) and 8(b) of the Schedule to the Regulations of 2006 have been a matter of adjudication and interpretation before the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of *In Re: Construction of Park at Noida Near Okhla Bird Sanctuary v. Union of India (UOI) & Ors.*, (supra). In that case, Hon'ble Supreme Court was concerned with the construction of a park in Noida near the Okhla Bird Sanctuary. The Hon'ble Supreme Court provided a distinction between a 'Township project' and 'Building and Construction project' and held that a 'Township project' was different, both quantitatively and qualitatively from a mere 'Building and Construction project'. Further, that an Area Development project may be connected with the Township Development

project and may be its first stage when grounds are cleared, roads and pathways are laid out and provisions are made for drainage, sewage, electricity and telephone lines and the whole range of other *civic infrastructure*, or an area development project may be completely independent of any township development project as in the case of creating an artificial lake, or an urban forest or setting up a zoological or botanical park or a recreational, amusement or a theme park. The Hon'ble Supreme Court principally held that a zoological or botanical park or a recreational park etc. would fall within the category of Entry 8(b) but, if it does not specify the threshold marker of minimum area, then it may have to be excluded from operation of the mandatory condition of seeking prior Environmental Clearance. The Court held as under:

“66. The illustration given by Mr. Bhushan may be correct to an extent. Constructions with built up area in excess of 1, 50,000 sq mtrs. would be huge by any standard and in that case the project by virtue of sheer magnitude would qualify as township development project. *To that limited extent* there may be a quantitative correlation between items 8(a) and 8(b). But it must be realized *that the converse of the illustration given by Mr. Bhushan may not be true*. For example, a project which is by its nature and character an "Area Development project" would not become a "Building and Construction project" simply because it falls short of the threshold mark under item 8 (b) but comes within the area specified in item 8 (a). The essential difference between items 8(a) and 8(b) lies not only in the different magnitudes but in the difference in the nature and character of the projects enumerated there under.

67. In light of the above discussion it is difficult to see the project in question as a "Building and Construction project". Applying the test of 'Dominant Purpose or Dominant Nature' of the project or the "*Common Parlance*" test, *i.e. how a common person using it and enjoying its facilities would view it, the project can only be categorized under item 8(b) of the schedule as a Township and Area Development project*". But under that category it does not come up to the threshold marker inasmuch as the total area of the project (33.43 hectares) is less than 50 hectares and its built-up area even if the hard landscaped area and the covered areas are put together comes to 1,05,544.49 square metres, *i.e., much below the threshold marker of 1,50,000 square metres.*”

35. Besides dealing with the scope and dimensions of Entries 8(a) and 8(b) of the Schedule afore-stated, the Hon'ble Supreme Court, while referring to the findings given by the CEC in its report, that the Project was located at a distance of 50 mtrs. from the Okhla Bird Sanctuary and that in all probability, the project site would have fallen in the Eco-Sensitive Zone had a timely decision in this regard being taken by the State Government/MoEF, permitted continuation of the project, and held as under:

“74. The report of the CEC succinctly sums up the situation. Though everyone, excepting the Project Proponents, views the construction of the project practically adjoining the bird sanctuary as a potential hazard to the sensitive and fragile ecological balance of the Sanctuary there is no law to stop it. This unhappy and anomalous situation has arisen simply because despite directions by this Court the authorities in the Central and the State Governments have so far not been able to evolve a principle to notify the buffer zones around Sanctuaries and National Parks to protect the sensitive and delicate ecological balance required for the sanctuaries. But the absence of a statute will not preclude this Court from examining the project's effects on the environment with particular reference to the Okhla Bird Sanctuary. For, in the jurisprudence developed by this Court Environment is not merely a statutory issue. Environment is one of the facets of the right to life guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution”

36. The above dictum of the Supreme Court clearly laid down a fine distinction between Entries 8(a) and 8(b) of the Schedule to the Regulations of 2006 on one hand, while on the other hand held that mere absence of law cannot be a ground for degrading the environment, as environment is one of the facets of 'Right to Life' as envisaged under Article 21 of the Constitution of India.

37. Thus, this Tribunal has to examine the ambit and scope of Entry 8(b) while keeping in mind the Scheme and Object of the Act of 1986, the Rules of 1986, the Regulations of 2006 along with its Schedule and most importantly right to clean environment as an integral concept of our Constitutional Scheme. The project in question is construction of a 'Signature Bridge' over River Yamuna, connecting eastern and western ends of the city of Delhi and to ensure fast and smooth flow of traffic in that part of the city. This certainly is an Area

Development project falling within Entry 8(b) of Schedule to the Regulations of 2006. There is also no dispute that the total constructed area of the 'Signature Project' is 1,55,260 sq. mtrs., which is higher than the threshold marker of 1,50,000 sq. mtrs. This project cannot fall within Entry 7(f) of the Schedule to the Regulations of 2006, as it is neither a national nor a city highway and not even any part thereof.

38. Having held that the project in question is covered under Entry 8(b) of the Schedule to the Regulations of 2006, now we have to consider what relief can be granted to the Applicant in the facts and circumstances of the case. Admittedly, particularly according to the Project Proponent, various other departments have granted them clearances and/or have already issued No Objection Certificates for construction of the said project. MoEF vide its letter dated 14th March, 2007 had informed the Project Proponent that 'bridges' are not covered under the Regulations of 2006 and as such, no prior Environment Clearance was required for commencement of the project. It is in the backdrop of these circumstances that the construction of the project commenced in the year 2007. As of today, more than 80 per cent of the bridge has already been completed. Huge public funds have been spent on this project. It is intended to serve public purpose and is in public interest, namely free and fast flow of traffic between east and west Delhi. Apparently, we cannot attribute any fault or breach of legal duty to the Project Proponent (Respondent No. 1). We do not think it is a case where we should either direct stoppage of project work or direct demolition thereof."

151. These Entries thus need to be construed liberally and given a wider meaning. As already stated above, on their plain reading the projects of whatever nature they may be, but so far as they are covering an area of more than the threshold limit specified in these Entries, they would be covered under the Schedule for which it would be mandatory to obtain prior Environmental Clearance. The contention that the Notification of 2006 and the Schedule would not apply to such projects thus, cannot be accepted. The projects whether residential or multi-purpose would squarely fall within the ambit and scope of the Entries in the Schedule particularly when

neither the language of the Notification of 2006 nor the Entries anywhere suggests that the framers intended to exclude such building projects.

152. To obtain Environmental Clearance prior to commencement of any activity or project is the mandate of law. This language has to be given its proper and purposive meaning. It is undoubtedly mandatory. When the law mandates prior approval, it ought not to be averred as post activity approval or *ex-post facto* permission. In such cases, courts have to consider whether any remedial measures can be imposed or certain harsher directions are called for. The Supreme Court in the case of *A.P. Pollution Control Board vs. Prof. M.V. Nayudu (Retd.) and Ors.*, (2001) 2 SCC 62 was concerned with the interpretation of Section 25 of the Water Act which requires that no person shall, without the previous consent of the State Board, establish or take any steps to establish any industry, operation or process, or any treatment and disposal system or an extension or addition thereto, which is likely to discharge sewage or trade effluent into a stream or well or sewer or on land etc. The Supreme Court held that it was a condition precedent not only for operating the unit but even for establishment of an industry. While considering the aspect that on the basis of material before it, it would not be a fit case for directing no objection from the Pollution Control Board and that even it was not possible to hold that the safeguards suggested by the appellant Board will be adequate, in the light of the Reports. The Supreme Court held that plea of principle of 'promissory estoppel' would not be applicable and grant

of permission by other authorities would not accrue to the benefit of the industry in relation to grant of NOC. It will be useful to refer to the relevant paragraphs of the judgment of the Supreme Court:

“54. On point a(ii), it referred to the definition of 'pollution' in Section 2(c) of the Water Act, Section 2(f) which defines 'sewage effluent' and Section 2(k) which defines 'trade effluent' and observed that the 'pollution potential' of the industry was to be assessed. After referring to the effluents -Commercial Castor oil, Bleaching earth, Activated carbon. Nickel catalyst, Hyflo supercel, Sulphuric Acid, Caustic Soda, Methanol, Calcium Oxide, Alum - in all 1463 MTs per month and noticed that the monthly requirement of Hydrogen was 76 500 NM. As the industry is coal based, large quantity coal is required. It would produce huge quantities of BSS, HCO, HSA, Methyl, Fatty acids, Epoxidise, Glyceren etc. Hydroxy Stearic Acid, methyl Hydroxy Stearic Acid and methanol are serious health hazardous. Items in part II list of Schedule I to the 'Manufacture, Storage and Import of Hazardous Chemicals Rules, 1989' are the raw materials and RW2 (Dr. G.S. Siddhu) in his evidence agreed that these are hazardous (toxic) chemicals. The solid effluents generated every day are (i) spent bleaching earth 1250 Kgs, (ii) spent bleaching carbon 250 kgs, (iii) spent nickel catalyst '15 kgs. and (iv) sodium sulphate 3820 Kgs. (12-HSA) and 170 kgs. (from CME). Monthly turn out of effluents will be 400 MT. Every day 55 kgs. of nickel is consumed. Every day, 27,830 litres of water are to be used and normally the effluent will carry all these hazardous substances, including nickel. 'As it is, said that the water used could be reused for cultivation of lands in the premises of the industry, the toxic chemicals which get lodged in the surface layers of the soil will flow down in storm run offs or percolate into the ground water, to ultimately reach the water body of the two reservoirs. The NEAA further stated that Dr. Santappa in his evidence as RW-1 made admissions regarding gaseous effluents-fly ash, SO₂ CO₂ Oxides of Nitrogen, Oxides of Sulphur and suspended particulate matter. The solid and liquid effluents could reach the lakes through seepage. The factory cannot be located in the catchment area because run-offs due to rain will carry hazardous material along surface and through seepage. The NEAA adverted to the 'Drainage Basic Analysis' by the Central Ground Water Board, to the effect that the Basin "has moderate run-off and moderately high permeability of the terrain. As such the amount of infiltration is considerably high". The

said Report shows that rainfall in 796 mm (heaviest being 1326 mm) and there is every likelihood of the solids being "transported down along the gradient". The said Report of Central Ground Water Board, referred to "dolerite dykes" in the vicinity and the possibility of flow even more. Having regard to the location of the dyke and the speed and angle, the polluted water could reach Himayat Sagar which is hardly 2 m bgl. since the dam height is 1763.50 feet. Satellite maps of NSRA were also examined and relied for this purpose. Among the substances stored are nickel, sulphuric acid, HCA, which are well-known 'hazardous' substances.

57. The NEAA, then took up issue (b) as to the likelihood of the industry affecting the sensitive catchment area. It referred to the Expert Committee Report of the HMWSSB and its recommendations which led to the issuance of the GO 192 dated 31.3.94 and GO 111 dated 8.3.96. The NEAA concluded that the "establishment of any chemical industry, carries with it, the imminent dangers of the chemicals or chemical effluents polluting the water of Himayat Sagar and Osman Sagar".

62. In the light of the above exhaust he scientific Reports of the National Environmental Appellate Authority, New Delhi the Department of Chemical Technology, Bombay University and the National Geophysical Research Institute, Hyderabad - it cannot be said that the two lakes will not be endangered. The package of the IICT - which did not deal with the elimination of effluent effects, the opinion of Dr. Santappa, the view of Director of Industries, and the view of the Government of Andhra Pradesh must be held to be base on insufficient data and not scientifically accurate.

63. It is no doubt stated by the 7th Respondent that it is prepared to adopt the safety measures suggested by the appellant Board on 1.7.97 and also those suggested by Dr. Bhowmick, by trying to see that during storage of raw materials and after release of the hazardous liquids, they are put in containers and removed.

64. In respect of these drinking water reservoirs which cater to the needs of about 70 or 80 lakhs population, we cannot rely upon a bare assurance that care will be taken in the storage of serious hazardous materials. Nor can we rely on an assurance that these hazardous substances would be effectively removed without spillage. It is, in our view, not humanly possible for any department to keep track whether the pollutants are not spilled over. This is exactly where the 'precautionary principle' comes into play. The chance of an accident, within such close proximity of the reservoirs cannot be ruled out, as pointed out in the

Reports. Thus, we are led to the inference that there is a very great risk that these highly hazardous material could seep into the earth and reach the tanks, after passing through the dolerite dykes, as pointed by the National Geophysical Research Institute, Our inference from facts and the reports is that of a reasonable person, as pointed out in the main judgment in A.P. Pollution Board v. Prof. M.V. Nayudu.

65. On the basis of the scientific material now obtained by this Court from three highly reputed sources, this is certainly not a fit case for directing grant of NOC by the Pollution Control Board. It is not also possible to hold that the safeguards suggested by the appellant Board - pursuant to the direction of the Government dated 3.7.97, will be adequate, in the light of the Reports. We therefore hold that in the facts of this case, the Board could not be directed to suggest safeguards and there is every likelihood that safeguards could fail either due to accident, as stated in the report, or due to human error. We, therefore, hold on point 3 against the 7th Respondent-industry.

66. This point deals with the principle of promissory estoppel applied by the appellate authority, on the ground that once building permission and permission for change of land use were granted, the appellant Board could not refuse NOC, The learned Additional Solicitor General, Sri R.N. Trivedi referred to the amendment to Section 25(1) in this connection.

67. Under Section 25(1) of the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 as it original stood, Sub-section (1) thereof read as follows:

Section 25(1): Subject to the provisions of this section, no person shall, without the previous consent of the State Board, bring into use any new or altered outlet for the discharge of sewage or trade effluent into a stream or well or begin to make any new discharge of sewage or trade effluent into a stream or well”.

By Central Act 53/1988, the sub-section was amended and reads as follows:

Section 25(1): Subject to the provisions of this section, no person shall, without the previous consent of the State Board - (a) establish or take any steps to establish any industry, operation or process, or any treatment and disposal system or any extension or addition thereto, which is likely to discharge sewage or trade effluent into a stream or well or sewer or on land (such discharge being hereafter in this section referred to as discharge of sewage) or (b) bring into use any new or altered outlet for the discharge of

sewage, or (c) bring to make any new discharge or sewage”

After the amendment, the prohibition now extends even to 'establishment' of the industry of taking of steps for that process and therefore before consent of the Pollution Board is obtained, neither can the industry be established nor any steps can be taken to establish it.

68. The learned Additional Solicitor General of India, Sri Trivedi is right in contending that the 7th Respondent industry ought not to have taken steps to obtain approval of plans by the Gram Panchayat, nor for conversion of land use by the Collector, nor should it have proceeded with civil work in a installation of machinery. The action of the industry being contrary to the provisions of the Act, no equities can be claimed.

69. The learned Appellate Authority erred in thinking that because of the approval of plan by the Panchayat, or conversion of land use by the Collector or grant of letter of intent by the Central Government, a case for applying principle of "promissory estoppel" applied to the facts of this case. There could be no estoppel against the statute. The industry could not therefore seek an NOC after violating the policy decision of the Government. Point 4 is decided against the 7th Respondent accordingly.”

153. Wherever anyone violates the law and flouts the directions issued by the regulatory authority and other concerned authorities, commences construction without even applying for Environmental Clearance and completes the project or activity extensively, two fold consequences would follow. First, that it would render itself liable for imposition of penalties for contravention of the Act, Rules, Orders and directions in terms of Section 15 of the Act of 1986. The other, for issuance of directions in regard to the demolition or grant of consent subject to such conditions as may be considered appropriate by the authorities or the Tribunal. Tribunal exercising its appellate power and Original jurisdiction in terms of Section 14 and 16 of the Act of 2010, has the powers of merit and judicial review and is competent to issue such directions as it may deem

necessary in terms of the said provisions including Section 18 of the NGT Act, 2010. The Court and Tribunals, particularly, in such cases of *fait accompli* have adopted a more practical approach which would permit the remaining work of the project to be completed while providing stringent safeguards in the interest of the environment as well as issuing orders which would vest the Project Proponent with civil consequences. In the case of *Sterlite Industries (India) Ltd. v. Union of India (UOI) and Ors.*, (2013) 4 SCC 575, Supreme Court held that the appellant company was liable to pay compensation of Rs. 100 crores for polluting the environment and operating its industry without renewal of consent by the Board. In this case, industry had obtained consent to operate from the Board prior and subsequent to the period when it operated without consent of the Board. After passing of the judgment of the Supreme Court in this very case, the Tribunal directed the industry to take precautionary measures as well as directed the Pollution Control Board to impose more stringent conditions while permitting the industry to operate (*M/s Sterlite Industries (India) Ltd. v. Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board*, 2013 ALL (I) NGT REPORTER (DELHI) 368).

154. Further, in the case of *Sarang Yadvadkar and Ors v. The Commissioner, Pune Municipal Corporation and Ors.*, 2013 ALL (I) NGT REPORTER (DELHI) 299, the Tribunal had passed remedial and prohibitory directions in the project underway. The Corporation was constructing elevated road n the floodplain. Major part of the project had already been constructed. The Tribunal directed partial demolition of the raised structure and further directed the

Corporation to construct the bridge on pillar so that there was no obstruction to the free flow of water and the course of the river was not adversely affected. This order of the Tribunal was challenged before the Supreme Court in Civil Appeal No. 3445 of 2015 and was dismissed by the Supreme Court vide its orders dated 12th February, 2015.

155. In somewhat similar situations like the one in hand, the Tribunal in the case of *Forward Foundation v. State of Karnataka and Ors.*, Original Application No. 222 of 2014 decided on 7th May, 2015, where the Project Proponents had raised the construction on the wet lands and the Rajakaluves (storm water drains), affecting the same, without obtaining prior Environmental Clearance. The Tribunal while appointing a special Committee referred to it various questions relating to environment and ecology and prohibited the Project Proponents from creating any third-party interests. The Tribunal further imposed 5 per cent of the project cost as environmental compensation on Project Proponent for degrading and damaging the environment and ecology of the area in question and had required the Committee to submit a report to the Tribunal. The Project Proponent in this case, had preferred a statutory appeal before the Supreme Court and *inter alia* took up the plea that they were not heard on merits and imposition of penalties was not proper. The Supreme Court vide its order dated 20th May, 2015 passed in the case of *Core Mind Software and Services Pvt. Ltd. v. Forward Foundation and Ors.*, Civil Appeal No. 4829/2015, granted liberty to them without setting aside the judgment and various

directions issued by the Tribunal and also to approach the Tribunal for recalling of Order and in the meanwhile stayed the direction pertaining to payment of compensation. The order of the Supreme Court reads as under:

“O R D E R

One of the main contentions raised by the appellants in these appeals is that though the Tribunal had heard the matter only on preliminary issues and no arguments on merit were advanced, final judgment decides the merits of the disputes as well and above all a penalty of Rs.117.35 crores against original Respondent no.9 (the appellant in C.A.No.4832 of 2015) and Rs.22.5 crores against Original Respondent No.10 (the appellant in C.A. No. 4829/2015) is imposed.

On the aforesaid averment, we feel that it would be more appropriate for the appellant to file an application before the Tribunal with the prayer to recall the order on merits and decide the matter afresh after hearing the counsel for the parties, as the Tribunal knows better as to what transpired at the time of hearing.

With the aforesaid liberty granted to the petitioners, the appeals are disposed of. Certain preliminary issues are decided against the appellants which are also the subject matter of challenge. However, it is not necessary to deal with the same at this stage. We make it clear that in case the said application is decided against the appellants or if ultimately on merits, it would be open to the appellants to challenge those orders by filing the appeal and in that appeal all the issues which are decided in the impugned judgment can also be raised.

The counsel for the appellants state that they would file the requisite application within one week. Till the said application is decided by the Tribunal, there shall be stay of the direction pertaining the payment of aforesaid penalty.

Mr. Raj Panjwani points out that the Tribunal has allowed the appellants to proceed with the construction only on the payment of the aforesaid fine/penalty. We leave it to the Tribunal to pass whatever orders it deems fit in this behalf, after hearing the parties.”

156. The Applicants filed an application before the Tribunal upon which notice was issued, whereby the Tribunal while continuing the

stay on the condition of payment of compensation, directed the Committee to file its report before the next date of hearing in terms of the judgment.

157. From the above judgments of the Supreme Court and the Tribunal, it is clear that in cases of the present kind, it would not be advisable to direct complete demolition of such properties. The Project Proponents claim to have invested huge amounts in raising these projects where it had obtained permission from other authorities and most importantly interest of 3rd party have been created in these properties. The Tribunal has to take a balanced approach while applying the principle of sustainable development and precautionary principle. Even in the case of *A.P. Pollution Control Board* (supra), the Supreme Court, laid great emphasis on the precautionary principle on the premise that it is always not possible to judge the environmental damage.

158. The Precautionary Principle may lose its material relevancy where the projects have been completed and even irreversible damage to the environment and ecology has been caused. The situation may be different when invoking this principle in cases of partially completed projects, it would become necessary to take remedial steps for protection of environment without any further delay. At this stage, it may still be possible to take steps while any further delay would render it absolutely impracticable. Precautionary Principle is a proactive method of dealing with the likely environmental damage. The purpose always should be to avert major environmental problem before the most serious

consequences and side effects would become obvious. To put it simply, Precautionary Principle is a tool for making better health and environmental decisions. It aims to prevent at the outset rather than manage it after the fact. In some cases, this principle may have to be applied with greater rigor particularly when the faults or acts of omission, commission are attributable to the Project Proponent.

The ambit and scope of the directions that can be issued under the Act of 1986 can be of very wide magnitude including power to direct closure, prohibition or regulation of any industry, operation or process and stoppage or regulation of supply of electricity or water or any other services of such projects. The principle of sustainable development by necessary implication requires due compliance to the doctrine of balancing and precautionary principle.

159. In appropriate cases, the Courts and Tribunals have to issue directions in light of the facts and circumstances of the case. The powers of the higher judiciary under Article 226 and 32 of the Constitution are very wide and distinct. The Tribunal has limited powers but there is no legislative or other impediment in exercise of power for issuance of appropriate directions by the Tribunal in the interest of justice. Most of the environmental legislations couched the authorities with power to formulate program and planning as well as to issue directions for protecting the environment and preventing its degradation. These directions would be case centric and not general in nature. Reference can be made to judgment of

the Supreme Court in the case of *M.C. Mehta and another vs. Union of India and others*, JT 1987 (1)SC 1, *Vineet Narain and Ors. vs. Union of India (UOI) and Anr.*, JT 1997 (10)SC 247 and *University of Kerala vs. Council, Principals', Colleges, Kerala and Ors.*, JT 2009 (14)SC 283.

160. In light of the above, even if the structures of the Project Proponents are to be protected and no harsh directions are passed in that behalf, still the Tribunal would be required to pass appropriate directions to prevent further damage to the environment on the one hand and control the already caused degradation and destruction of the environment and ecology by these projects on the other hand. Furthermore, they cannot escape the liability of having flouted the law by raising substantial construction without obtaining prior Environmental Clearance as well as by flouting the directions issued by the authorities from time to time. The penalties can be imposed for such disobedience or non-compliance. The authorities have already initiated action against three of the Project Proponents and have taken proceedings in the Court of competent jurisdiction under Act of 1986. However, no action has been taken against other four Project Proponents as of now. Penalties can be imposed for violation in due course upon full trial. What requires immediate attention is the direction that Tribunal should pass for mitigating as well as preventing further harm. As far as further remedial measures, alterations, demolition or variation in the existing structure in the interest of environment and ecology which is required to be taken to preserve the

environment are to be suggested by the Committee that we propose to constitute. However, as far as damage that has already been caused to the environment and ecology by the illegal and unauthorized action of the Project Proponents, they are required to pay compensation for its restoration and restitution in terms of Section 15 of Act of 2010. Needless to notice here that in this case, the Project Proponents were heard at great length on facts and merits of the case.

161. We may specifically notice here that all the Project Proponents had filed contentions and documents in support of their respective case. They addressed the Tribunal at length on factual matrix of the case as well as on law. Various contentions and claims raised by the Project Proponents before the Tribunal have been deliberated in detail.

162. In all cases, SEIAA has passed an order directing delisting of applications for Environmental Clearance which is sought to be questioned by the Project Proponents. We do not find any fault on the part of SEIAA and other official Respondents in delisting the applications for obtaining Environmental Clearance. Just one reason is enough to de-list and to reject these applications which is, that they started construction of their respective projects without obtaining Environmental Clearance and in some cases without even applying for grant of Environmental Clearance. All of them violated the direction of SEIAA as well as their own undertaking and apology to SEIAA that they would not raise any construction till grant of Environmental Clearance. There is more than ample evidence on

record that such violations have been committed. Projects are squarely covered under the Notification of 2006 and, therefore, we find no infirmity in the order of SEIAA in delisting applications of Project Proponents for grant of Environmental Clearance.

163. In view of the above detailed discussion, we pass the following order and directions:

- 1) We hold and declare the Office Memoranda dated 12th December, 2012 and 27th June, 2013 as *ultra vires* the provisions of the Act of 1986 and the Notification of 2006. They suffer from the infirmity of lack of inherent jurisdiction and authority. Resultantly, we quash both these Office Memoranda.
- 2) Consequently, the above Office Memoranda are held to be ineffective and we prohibit the MoEF and the SEIAA in the entire country from giving effect to these Office Memoranda in any manner, whatsoever.
- 3) We hold and declare that the resolution/orders passed by the SEIAA, de-listing the applications of the Project Proponents, do not suffer from any legal infirmity. These orders are in conformity with the provisions of the Act of 1986 and the Notification of 2006 and do not call for interference.
- 4) We hereby constitute a Committee of the following Members:
 - a) Member Secretary of SEIAA, Tamil Nadu.

- b) Member Secretary, Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board.
- c) Professor from Department of Civil Engineering, Environmental Branch, IIT Bombay.
- d) Representative not below the rank of Director from the Ministry of Environment and Forest (to be nominated in three days from the date of pronouncement of this judgment).
- e) Representative of the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority.
- 5) Member Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board shall be the Nodal Officer of the Committee for compliance of the directions contained in this judgment.
- 6) The above Committee shall inspect all the projects in question and submit a comprehensive report to the Tribunal. This comprehensive report shall relate to the illegal and unauthorized acts and activities carried out by the Respondents. It shall deal with the ecological and environmental damage done by these projects. It would further deal with the installation of STP's and other anti-pollution devices by the Project Proponents, including the proposed point of discharge of sewage and any other untreated waste. The Expert Committee would also state in regard to the source of water during operation phase and otherwise, use of energy efficient devices, ecologically and environmentally sensitive areas and details of alteration of

and its effect on the natural topography, the natural drainage system etc. The Committee shall also examine the adequacy of rainwater harvesting system and parking area and if at all they have been provided. The report shall also deal with the mechanism provided for collection and disposal of municipal solid waste at the project site.

- 7) The Committee shall further report if the conditions stated in the planning permission and other permissions granted by various authorities have been strictly complied with or not.
- 8) The Committee shall also report to the Tribunal if the suggestions made by the SEIAA in its meetings adequately takes care of environment and ecology in relation to these projects.
- 9) What measures and steps, including demolition, if any, or raising of additional structures are required to be taken in the interest of environment and ecology?
- 10) All the Project Proponents shall pay environmental compensation of 5 per cent of their project value for restoration and restitution of the environment and ecology as well as towards their liability arising from impacts of the illegal and unauthorized constructions carried out by them. They shall deposit this amount at the first instance, which shall be subject to further adjustment. Liability of each of the Respondents is as follows:

Mr. Y. Pondurai.: Rs. 7.4125 crores.

M/s Ruby Manoharan Property Developers Pvt. Ltd.: Rs. 1.8495 crores.

M/s Jones Foundations Pvt. Ltd.: Rs. 7 crores.

M/s SSM Builders and Promoters: Rs. 36 crores.

M/s SPR and RG Construction Pvt. Ltd.: Rs. 12.5505 crores.

M/s Dugar Housing Ltd.: Rs. 6.8795 crores.

M/s SAS Realtors Pvt. Ltd.: Rs. 4.5 crores.

- 11) The compensation shall be payable to the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board within three weeks from the date of the pronouncement of this judgment. The amounts shall be kept in a separate account and shall be utilised by the Boards for the above stated purpose and subject to further orders of the Tribunal.
- 12) The above environmental compensation is being imposed on account of the intentional defaults and the conduct attributable only to the Project Proponents. We direct that the Project Proponents shall not pass on this compensation to the purchasers/prospective purchasers, as an element of sale.
- 13) After submission of the report by the Expert Committee, the Tribunal would pass further directions for consideration of the matter by SEIAA in accordance with law.
- 14) All the project proponents are hereby prohibited from raising any further constructions, creating third party interest and/or giving possession to the

purchasers/prospective purchasers without specific orders of the Tribunal, after submission of the report by the Expert Committee.

The report shall be submitted to the Registry of the Tribunal within a period of 45 days from the date of pronouncement of this judgment. Thereupon, the Registry would place the matter before this Tribunal for further appropriate orders and directions.

Liberty to the parties to move the Tribunal for any further directions and/or clarifications, if they so desire.

164. The above Appeal and Applications are accordingly disposed of. However, in the facts and circumstances of the case, we leave the parties to bear their own cost.

Justice Swatanter Kumar
Chairperson

Justice U.D. Salvi
Judicial Member

Dr. D.K. Agrawal
Expert Member

Prof. A.R. Yousuf
Expert Member

Mr. Bikram Singh Sajwan
Expert Member

New Delhi
7th July, 2015

M/S Yathin Stone Crushers vs State Of Karnataka on 13 September, 2022

M/S Yathin Stone Crushers vs State Of Karnataka on 13 September, 2022

Author: Alok Aradhe

Bench: Alok Aradhe

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IN THE HIGH COURT OF KARNATAKA AT BENGALURU

DATED THIS THE 13TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER, 2022

PRESENT

THE HON'BLE MR. ALOK ARADHE
ACTING CHIEF JUSTICE

AND

THE HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE S.VISHWAJITH SHETTY

WRIT PETITION NO.52207/2019 (GM-MM-S)

BETWEEN:

SRI M.S. RAGHU
S/O SRI SHIVANNA
AGED ABOUT 38 YEARS
R/AT RAGIMUDDANAHALLI
VILLAGE, CHINAKURALI HOBLI
PANDAVAPURA TALUK
MANDYA DIST - 571 455.PETITIONER

(BY SRI LAKAMAPURMATH CHIDANANDAYYA, ADV.)

AND:

1. STATE OF KARNATAKA
REPRESENTED BY ITS SECRETARY
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
AND INDUSTRIES, (MSME AND MINES)
VIKASA SOUDHA
BANGALORE - 560 001.
2. DIRECTOR
DEPARTMENT OF MINES AND
GEOLOGY, KHANIJA BHAVAN
RACE COURSE ROAD
BANGALORE - 560 001.

M/S Yathin Stone Crushers vs State Of Karnataka on 13 September, 2022

3. SENIOR GEOLOGIST (MINES)
DEPARTMENT OF MINES AND
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GEOLOGY, VIDYANAGAR IST CROSS
MANDYA TOWN, MANDYA
DISTRICT - 571 455.

4. THE DISTRICT LEVEL ENVIRONMENT
IMPACT, ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY
REPRESENTED BY ITS CHAIRMAN
CUM DEPUTY COMMISSIONER
MANDYA DISTRICT
MANDYA DIST - 571 455.

5. STATE LEVEL ENVIRONMENT IMPACT
ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY
REPRESENTED BY ITS SECRETARY
AMBEDKAR VEEDHI, M.S.BUILDING
IIND FLOOR, BENGALURU - 560 001.

...RESPONDENTS

(BY SRI S.S. MAHENDRA, AGA FOR R-1 TO R-4;
SRI D. NAGARAJ, ADV., FOR R-5)

THIS WRIT PETITION IS FILED UNDER ARTICLES 226
AND 227 OF THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA PRAYING TO
QUASH THE NOTICE AT ANNEXURE-A DATED 16.10.2019
BEARING NO.DMG:SG:KGG:2019-20/2720 ISSUED BY THE
3RD RESPONDENT.

THIS PETITION COMING ON FOR PRELIMINARY
HEARING THIS DAY, VISHWAJITH SHETTY J., MADE THE
FOLLOWING:

ORDER

This writ petition has been filed seeking for the following reliefs:

"a) Call for record which ultimately resulted in issuing notice ANNEXURE-A dated 16.10.2019 bearing No.DMG:SG:KGG:2019-20/2720 issued by the 3rd Respondent.

b) Issue an order, direction, writ in the nature of certiorari quashing Notice Annexure-A dated 16.10.2019 bearing No.DMG:SG:KGG:2019-

20/2720 issued by the issued by the 3rd Respondent;

c) Declare that the petitioner has got deemed Environmental Clearance by operation of rule 8(iii) of EIA Notification 2006 dated 14th September 2006 and consequently insisting to obtain the

M/S Yathin Stone Crushers vs State Of Karnataka on 13 September, 2022

Environmental clearance once again by the petitioner is without jurisdiction and ultra vires the powers conferred on the 3rd Respondent.

OR IN THE ALTERNATE

d) Issue an order, direction, writ in the nature of Mandamus directing the 4th Respondent to forward the file/application of the petitioner to the 5th respondent for grant of Environmental clearance and consequently directing the 5th respondent to consider the applications by granting Environmental clearance to the petitioner in the light of recommendation made by the District Level Expert Appraisal Committee;

e) Issue such other relief or reliefs as this Hon'ble Court deems fit in the circumstances of the case in the interest of justice".

2. Heard the learned counsel appearing for the parties and also perused the material available on record.

3. It is the case of the petitioner that the land bearing Sy.No.1 measuring 1.20 acres situated at Baby Bettadakavalu Village, Pandavapura Taluk, Mandya District, is the Government land consisting of building stones and a Notification granting the quarry lease to the petitioner was issued in respect of the said land pursuant to the application made by him and thereafter survey and demarcation was done and lease deed in QL No.616 was also executed in favour of the petitioner authorizing him to remove, extract and transport building stones from the said land for a period of 20 years with effect from 28.06.2003. The petitioner had made an application to respondent No.4 on 14.06.2017 seeking Environmental Clearance for carrying on quarrying operation in the land in question. Considering the said application, reports were called from the Assistant Commissioner and the Assistant Conservator of Forest by the District Level Expert Appraisal Committee for grant of Environmental Clearance and after receiving the reports, the District Level Expert Appraisal Committee had recommended for grant of Environmental Clearance in favour of the petitioner. Though such a recommendation was made on 01.09.2017, respondent No.4 had failed to take any decision on the application filed by the petitioner for Environmental Clearance as provided under the Notification vide Annexure-D dated 14.09.2006.

4. It is the further case of the petitioner that though he is entitled for a deemed Environmental Clearance as provided under Clause 8(iii) of the aforesaid Notification, respondent No.3 had issued a notice to the petitioner calling upon him to obtain a Environmental Clearance. Under these circumstances, he has approached this Court seeking for the aforesaid reliefs.

5. Learned counsel appearing for the petitioner submits that undisputedly no order has been passed or communicated to the petitioner on the application filed by him seeking Environmental Clearance before the competent authority and therefore in view of Clause 8

(iii) of the Notification vide Annexure-D, the petitioner is deemed to have been granted Environmental Clearance and therefore, there is no necessity for him to obtain a separate

Environmental Clearance from respondent No.4.

6. Per contra, learned counsel appearing for respondent No.5 submits that National Green Tribunal has stayed the aforesaid Notification on 13.09.2018 and it has held that respondent No.4 has no authority to issue Environmental Clearance and it is only respondent No.5, who is the authority for issuing Environmental Clearance. He submits that now a new format is provided for filing an application seeking Environmental Clearance and therefore the petitioner is required to submit a fresh application and if the same is filed, it will be considered in accordance with law.

7. The undisputed facts of the case are the petitioner has been granted a quarry lease pursuant to the Notification issued by the State Government and in compliance of the Notification dated 14.09.2016 at Annexure-D, the petitioner had made an application before respondent No.4 seeking grant of Environmental Clearance for quarry lease activities on 14.06.2017. After receiving reports from the competent authority, respondent No.4 had recommended for granting Environmental Clearance to the petitioner and the copy of meeting proceedings of respondent No.4 dated 01.09.2017 is available on record at Annexure-H. Though respondent No.4 had forwarded the recommendation to respondent No.5 for grant of Environmental Clearance on 01.09.2017 itself, respondent No.5 who is the regulatory authority has not taken any decision on the application of the petitioner.

8. Clause 8 of the Notification vide Annexure-D provides for grant or rejection of prior Environmental Clearance. Clause 8(iii) of the said Notification reads as follows:

"8(iii) In the event that the decision of the regulatory authority is not communicated to the applicant within the period specified in sub- paragraphs (i) or (ii) above, as applicable, the applicant may proceed as if the environment clearance sought for has been granted or denied by the regulatory authority in terms of the final recommendations of the Expert Appraisal Committee or State level Expert Appraisal Committee concerned."

9. From a reading of the aforesaid Clause, it is very clear that in the event the regulatory authority has not communicated its decision to the applicant within the period specified in sub paragraphs (i) or (ii) of Clause 8, the applicant may proceed as if the Environmental Clearance sought for has been granted or denied by the regulatory authority in terms of the final recommendations of the Expert Appraisal Committee or State level Appraisal Committee concerned. In the present case, respondent No.4 which was then Appraisal Committee had recommended for grant of Environmental Clearance to the petitioner and in spite of the same, respondent No.5 which is the regulatory authority had not communicated any decision to the petitioner herein within the time prescribed as provided under Clause 8(i) & (ii) of the Notification vide Annexure-D. Under the circumstances, we are of the considered view that the petitioner is entitled for a deemed Environmental Clearance and therefore the subsequent Notice Annexure-A issued by respondent No.3 is not sustainable in law.

10. The contention urged by the learned counsel for respondent No.5 that the petitioner is required to make a fresh application in view of the subsequent order passed by the National Green Tribunal is liable to be rejected for the reasons that as on the date of the order passed by the National Green

M/S Yathin Stone Crushers vs State Of Karnataka on 13 September, 2022

Tribunal, by fiction of law, the petitioner's application seeking Environmental Clearance was deemed to have been allowed or granted. Under the circumstances, we are of the considered view that the petitioner is entitled for the reliefs sought for by him in the petition. Accordingly, the following:

ORDER Writ petition is allowed.

The impugned Notice vide Annexure-A

dated 16.10.2019 bearing
NO.DMG:SG:KGG:2019-20/2720 issued by
respondent No.3 is quashed and the

petitioner is declared to have been granted deemed Environmental Clearance.

Sd/-

ACTING CHIEF JUSTICE Sd/-

JUDGE NMS

**M/S Siddhasiri Souharda Sahakari ... vs Karnataka State
Pollution Control ... on 21 August, 2024**

-1-

NC: 2024:KHC:33869-DB
WP No. 10181 of 2024

IN THE HIGH COURT OF KARNATAKA AT BENGALURU

DATED THIS THE 21ST DAY OF AUGUST, 2024

PRESENT

THE HON'BLE MR. N. V. ANJARIA, CHIEF JUSTICE

AND

THE HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE K. V. ARAVIND

WRIT PETITION No. 10181 OF 2024 (GM-POL)

BETWEEN:

1. M/S SIDDHASIRI SOUHARDA SAHAKARI NIYAMITHA,
CHINCOLLI TALUKA,
KALBURAGI DISTRICT-585307.
REPRESENTED BY ITS DIRECTOR,
SRI RAMANAGOUDA B. PATIL,
S/O SRI BASANAGOUDA PATIL,
AGE: 29, OCC: BUSINESS

...PETITIONER

(BY SRI K.N. PHANINDRA, SENIOR COUNSEL FOR
SRI DALWAI VENKATESH P., ADVOCATE)Digitally
signed by
VALLI
MARIMUTHU

Location:

High Court of
Karnataka

AND:

1. KARNATAKA STATE POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD,
PARISARA BHAVANA ,
1 TO 5TH FLOOR,
No.49, CHURCH STREET,
BANGALORE-650001,
REPRESENTED BY ITS CHAIRMAN.
2. THE SECRETARY,
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST
AND CLIMATE CHANGE,
(IMPACT ASSESSMENT DIVISION),

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA,

- 2 -

NC: 2024:KHC:33869-DB

WP No. 10181 of 2024

INDIRA PARYAVARAN BHAVAN,
VAYUWING, 3RD FLOOR,
ALIGANJ, JORBAGH ROAD,
NEW DELHI-110003.

...RESPONDENTS

(BY SRI K. SHASHI KIRAN SHETTY, SENIOR ADVOCATE FOR
SRI A. MAHESH CHOWDHARY, ADVOCATE FOR C/R1;
SRI ARVIND KAMATH, ASGI A/W
SRI H. SHANTHI BHUSHAN, DSGI FOR R2)

THIS WRIT PETITION IS FILED UNDER ARTICLES 226 AND
227 OF THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA PRAYING TO ISSUE A WRIT
IN THE NATURE OF MANDAMUS DIRECTION THE RESPONDENT
TO ISSUE CONSENT FOR OPERATION IN FAVOUR OF THE
PETITIONER IN TERMS OF THE APPLICATION DATED 29/01/2024
PRODUCED AT ANNEXURE-B FORTHWITH.

THIS WRIT PETITION COMING ON FOR ORDERS THIS DAY,
ORDER WAS MADE THEREIN AS UNDER:

CORAM: HON'BLE THE CHIEF JUSTICE MR. JUSTICE
N. V. ANJARIA
and
HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE K. V. ARAVIND

ORAL ORDER

(PER: HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE K.V. ARAVIND) The instant writ petition under Articles 226 of the Constitution of India with the following prayers, "(a) A writ in the nature of mandamus direction the Respondent to issue Consent for Operation in favour of the petitioner in terms of the application dated 29.01.2024 produced at Annexure-B forthwith in the interest of justice and equity.

(b) Any other direction or order may be passed in the interest of justice."

NC: 2024:KHC:33869-DB

2. Heard learned Senior Advocate Mr. K.N. Phanindra for learned advocate Mr. Dalwai Venkatesh for the petitioner, learned Senior Advocate Mr. K. Shashi Kiran Shetty for learned advocate Mr. A. Mahesh Chowdhary for respondent No.1 and learned Additional Solicitor General of India Mr. K. Aravind Kamath along with learned Deputy Solicitor General of India Mr. H. Shanthi Bhushan for respondent No.2.

Brief facts.

3. The petitioner owns a Sugar, Cogen and Distillery Unit at Chincholi, Kalaburagi District. Respondent No.1- the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board issued a closure order dated 25.01.2024. While considering the challenge to the order dated 25.01.2024 in Writ Petition No.2769 of 2024, this Court by order dated 08.02.2024 directed the closure order to be treated as show-cause notice and permitted the petitioner to file objections. It is stated that due to subsequent events, the show-cause notice and related proceedings are not relevant.

4. As stated, the petitioner filed an application for the issue of Consent for Establishment [Expansion] and Consent for Operation [CFO] on 29.01.2024. Respondent No.1 issued Consent for NC: 2024:KHC:33869-DB Establishment on 14.03.2024. The Environmental Officer, on inspection of the petitioner's industry, recommended the grant of CFO. The petitioner has deposited a fee of Rs.40,00,000/- towards the CFO.

5. Respondent No.1 insisted on Environmental Clearance [EC] from Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India [MOEFCC] as a condition for the issue of CFO. It is stated that though the petitioner is benefited with deemed EC, respondent No.1 withheld the issue of CFO. The Expert Appraisal Committee, as per Annexure-J, dated 09.11.2023, recommended a grant of EC in favour of the petitioner.

6. It is stated that EC is issued as per the Environmental Impact Assessment Notification, 2006 [for short 'Notification 2006']. The Regulatory Authority can confirm or reject the recommendation of the EC by the Expert Appraisal Committee within 45 days, failing which, under Paragraph 8(i) and (iii) of the Notification 2006, the EC is deemed to have been granted after 45 days. It is stated that even though the Member Secretary and the Regulatory Authority are the members of the Expert Appraisal Committee, respondent NC: 2024:KHC:33869-DB No.1 failed to issue the CFO. Alleging inaction, the present petition.

Submissions:

7. Learned Senior Advocate Mr. K.N. Phanindra for the petitioner submits that the Expert Appraisal Committee, in its Minutes of the Meeting held on 09.11.2023, has recommended for grant of EC in favour of the petitioner. The recommendation has been uploaded to the website. It is further submitted that the Member Secretary and the Regulatory Authority are the members of the Expert Appraisal Committee, and the recommendation of the Expert Appraisal Committee was within the knowledge of respondent No.1.

7.1 As per Paragraph 8(i) and (iii) of the Notification 2006, if no decision is taken on the recommendation within 45 days, on expiry of 45 days, the recommendation of the Expert Appraisal Committee is deemed to be a public document under Paragraph 8(iv) of the Notification 2006. By operation of law, the EC is deemed to have been granted; consequently, respondent No.1 is bound to issue a CFO. It is submitted that the inaction of respondent No.1 has resulted in stalling huge investment and workforce.

NC: 2024:KHC:33869-DB 7.2 Learned Senior Advocate submits that even if the industry has started before environmental clearance, the Environment (Protection) Act, 1996 does not prohibit ex post facto environmental clearance.

8. Per contra, Mr. K. Shashi Kiran Shetty, Senior Advocate appearing on behalf of learned advocate Mr. A. Mahesh Chowdhary for respondent No.1 by reiterating the contentions raised on the statement of objections, submits that the recommendation made in the Minutes of Meeting dated 09.11.2023 by the Expert Appraisal Committee has been recalled on 17.11.2023. The Minutes of the Meeting by the Expert Appraisal Committee dated 09.11.2023 recommending issuance of EC was on the basis of the Office Memorandum dated 07.07.2021. It is further submitted that the Hon'ble Supreme Court in Writ Petition No.1394 of 2023 on 02.01.2024 has stayed the operation of the Office Memorandum dated 07.07.2021. Thus submits that the recommendation by the Expert Appraisal Committee dated 09.11.2023 is not justifiable.

8.1 Learned Advocate General submits that the concept of deemed clearance under Paragraph 8(iii) of the Notification 2006 is NC: 2024:KHC:33869-DB unavailable. In support of such submission relies on the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of Secretary, Kerala State Coastal Management Authority vs. DLF Universal Limited and others reported in (2018) 2 SCC 203.

9. Learned Additional Solicitor General of India, Mr. K. Aravind Kamath, appearing for respondent No.2 impleaded vide order dated 08.08.2024, submits that the recommendation by the Expert Appraisal Committee for grant of EC on 09.11.2023 is not recalled as contended by learned advocate for respondent No.1 and the same is in force. It is further submitted that in terms of Paragraph 8 of the Notification 2006, if no decision is made within 45 days by the Regulatory Authority on the final recommendation of the Expert Appraisal Committee, on expiry of the period specified, the applicant can proceed as if the environment clearance sought for has been granted.

Analysis:

10. Considered the submissions of learned advocates for the respective parties and perused the writ papers.

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11. The petitioner owns a Sugar, Cogen and Distillery Unit at Chincholi, Kalaburagi District. The petitioner submitted an application for the issue of Consent for Establishment [Expansion] and CFO on 29.01.2024. The Consent for Establishment [Expansion] was issued by respondent No.1 on 14.03.2024. The Environmental Officer, after inspection of the petitioner's industry, recommended to grant CFO. The petitioner has deposited the consent fee of Rs.40,00,000/- towards the CFO. Respondent No.1, under communication dated 19.03.2024, demanded certain compliances for the issue of CFO, and under reply dated 22.03.2024, the compliances are made. For consideration of the issue of CFO, respondent No.1 insisted EC from MOEFCC. The petitioner submitted an application for issuance of environmental clearance on 26.10.2023. In its meeting held on 09.11.2023, the Expert Appraisal Committee recommended granting EC in favour of the petitioner. It is on record

that the Member Secretary and the Regulatory Authority of respondent No.1 are members of the Expert Appraisal Committee and have knowledge of the recommendation of the Expert Appraisal Committee.

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12. The Notification 2006 governs the issue of EC. Paragraph 8(i) and (iii) of Notification 2006 mandates a timeframe decision by the Regulatory Authority on the recommendation of the Expert Appraisal Committee. If no decision is taken within 45 days, by operation of law, the EC is deemed to have been granted after 45 days. The Expert Appraisal Committee recommendation is deemed to be public document under Paragraph 8(iv) of the Notification 2006. In the present case, no decision has been made on the recommendation dated 09.11.2023 of the Expert Appraisal Committee, and Paragraph 8 of the Notification 2006 comes into operation. In the absence of any decision within 45 days of the recommendation of the Expert Appraisal Committee, the EC is deemed to have been granted.

13 Respondent No.1 sought to justify withholding CFO as awaiting clearance from the Expert Appraisal Committee. The reasoning is not justifiable and without basis. Respondent No.1 in the Statement of Objections has stated that the recommendation by the Expert Appraisal Committee dated 09.11.2023 has been recalled on 17.11.2023.

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14. Learned Additional Solicitor General of India appearing for respondent No.2 MOEFCC has made a categorical statement that the recommendation dated 09.11.2023 is not recalled and the same is valid. In view of the categorical statement by the learned Additional Solicitor General of India, the basis for inaction by respondent No.1 in issuing CFO is no more available and justifiable.

15. The contention of the learned advocate for respondent No.1 that the recommendation dated 09.11.2023 by the Expert Appraisal Committee was on the basis of the Office Memorandum dated 07.07.2021, the operation of the said Office Memorandum has been stayed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in Writ Petition No.1394 of 2023 on 02.01.2024 is without any basis.

16. The Expert Appraisal Committee has recommended the grant of EC on 09.11.2023, 45 days from 09.11.2023 expires on 24.12.2023. It is to be noticed that by operation of law under Paragraph 8 of the Notification 2006, the right of deemed grant of EC has accrued in favour of the petitioner. The stay of operation of the Office Memorandum is dated 02.01.2024. It is a trite law that any interim order of stay of the notification/statute will not take

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NC: 2024:KHC:33869-DB away any right accrued under a notification or a statute. Paragraph 8 of the Notification 2006, having extended/conferred right by fiction in favour of the petitioner, the same cannot be permitted to contend that said right is not available as a result of the interim order by the Hon'ble Supreme Court at a later point in time.

17. The Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of the DLF Universal Ltd., (supra), while examining the deemed clearance as per Paragraph 8(iii) of the Notification 2006, wherein the authorities raised various issues/violations after the DLF constructed the project substantively. The Hon'ble Supreme Court, while emphasizing the need, necessity and requirement of the authorities under the various statutes to act at the earliest point of time, has held that the deemed clearance should imply prior clearance and necessary clarifications be issued by the authorities concerned in a time bound manner to obviate such situations to arise in future. The observations of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the context of facts in that case are not applicable to the case at hand.

18. The deemed Environmental Clearance will not enable the applicant/industry to commence commercial operations. On the expiry of 45 days under Paragraph 8(iii) of the Notification of 2006,

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NC: 2024:KHC:33869-DB the recommendation of the Expert Appraisal Committee would result in deemed environmental clearance. The industry's operations would not immediately commence on deemed environmental clearance. The industry operations would begin on the issue of consent for operation. The concern expressed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court is dealt with through mechanism to issue CFO after deemed EC.

19. Respondent No.1 in its letter dated 19.03.2024 has stated as, "The industry has submitted a letter vide ref (6) stating that, the industry has submitted EC application on 19.1.2022 and 28.09.2023, the Expert Appraisal Committee(EAC) of MoEF & CC recommended the project for issue of EC on 09.11.2023. It is further stated that as per Section 8(i) & (iii) of EIA Notification 2006, the recommendation of the EAC is final if the acceptance / rejection is not communicated within 45 days i.e., on 24.12.2023, hence the EAC recommendation is considered as deemed EC and recommendation shall become public document. Further, the industry has requested for issue of CFO. However, the claim made by the industry with respect to "deemed EC" is to be clarified from MoEF & CC, Gol and the Board cannot accept the claim made by the industry."

20. In view of the specific assertion in the letter by Respondent No.1, it is clear that the recommendation of the Expert Appraisal Committee is final on expiry of 45 days and considered as deemed

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NC: 2024:KHC:33869-DB EC. However, the CFO was not issued to seek clarification from MOEFCC, Government of India. Respondent No.2 has stated before this Court that the recommendation of the Expert Appraisal Committee is in force as of this date. Respondent No.1 has

not stated any other reason for not issuing a CFO.

21. The respondent Board has not taken any viable defence before the Court as to why recommendation by Expert Appraisal Committee is not acceptable. The Board is unable to point out any other view possible on the recommendation of Expert Appraisal Committee. The Board has not assigned any reasons for its inaction on the recommendation of Expert Appraisal Committee within 45 days. In such circumstances, it is not open to the Board to contend that EC is not automatic on expiry of 45 days of Expert Appraisal Committee recommendation.

22. Once statute or the notification mandates time bound action, any compliance required is to be within the time frame. This requirement is observed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of Electrosteel Steels Limited Vs. Union of India and Others reported in (2023) 6 SCC 615.

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23. Even before the Court, Board has not pointed out any impactable concern in the recommendation of Expert Appraisal Committee disentitling the petitioner to EC. Board has not pointed out any violation under any statute by the petitioner thereby disentitling either EC or CFO.

24. The very purpose of deemed EC after a stipulated period is to ensure timely compliance by the competent authorities. Board has been provided reasonable period of 45 days to raise any concern on the recommendation of Expert Appraisal Committee. Either to permit industry or not is to be decided as per the timelines, failing which the very purpose would be defeated. Without a persuasive reason in not acting on the Expert Appraisal Committee recommendation within 45 days, it is not open to the Board to remain inactive on issue of CFO.

25. Before conclusion, it is relevant to refer to the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of Electrosteel Steels Limited (supra). The Hon'ble Supreme Court held as:

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NC: 2024:KHC:33869-DB "75. The 1986 Act does not prohibit ex post facto environmental clearance. Some relaxations and even grant of ex post facto EC in accordance with law, in strict compliance with rules, regulations notifications and/or applicable orders, in appropriate cases, where the projects are in compliance with, or can be made to comply with environment norms, is in over view not impermissible. The court cannot be oblivious to the economy or the need to protect the livelihood of hundreds of employees and others employed in the project and others dependent on the project, if such projects comply with environmental norms."

26. In view of the above position of law, the Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986 does not prohibit ex post facto environmental clearance.

27. In light of the facts and legal positions analyzed above, this Court finds no reason in favour of respondent No.1 for not issuing the CFO.

28. In the circumstance, respondent No.1 is to be directed to issue CFO in favour of the petitioner.

29. Accordingly, the following order is passed, ORDER

(i) The writ petition is allowed.

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(ii) Respondent No.1 is directed to issue CFO in favour of the petitioner within four weeks from the date of service of this order.

Sd/-

(N. V. ANJARIA) CHIEF JUSTICE Sd/-

(K. V. ARAVIND) JUDGE MV

**Proof of Service****Written Submissions on behalf of Respondent Nos. 7 & 8 in
OA/137/2025 titled as "Renu Bala & Anr. vs. Union of India & Ors."**

1 message

Office Vsalegal <office@vsalegal.in>

Fri, Nov 28, 2025 at 4:25 PM

To: "info@ralo-associates.com" <info@ralo-associates.com>, secy-moef@nic.in, msdpcc@nic.in, senv@nic.in, vcdda@dda.org.in, cpdelhi@delhipolice.gov.in

Cc: Sumeer Sodhi <sumeer@vsalegal.in>, Vanshika Jhamb <vanshika@vsalegal.in>

Dear Sir/ Ma'am,

Please see attached copy of the Written Submissions on behalf of Respondent Nos. 7 & 8 in the above captioned matter.

Kindly treat this mail as due service of the same.

Office of VSA Legal**Counsels for the Respondent No. 7 & 8**

Address - 32, Ground Floor,

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