

ALL ALONG THE COASTLINE

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Infrastructure: Roads

The Cabinet has approved a significant relaxation of development controls along the coastline through the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification 2018, as part of a plan to encourage construction of buildings and launch tourism activities in areas that are closer to the high tide line. State governments and others had made representations, calling for a review of coastal management policies. Recommendations for changes were then made by the Shailesh Nayak Committee.

The Centre has taken the view that both affordable housing availability and tourism will grow if restrictions on coastal zones are relaxed. With this objective, a decision has been taken to permit current Floor Space Index (FSI) or Floor Area Ratio (FAR) in urban areas coming under CRZ-II — which governs the size of buildings — as on the date of the new notification. This does away with the restrictions on construction which date back to the Development Control Rules of 1991. The CRZ-II urban category, as per the CRZ notification of 2011, pertains to areas “that have been developed up to or close to the shoreline”, and are legally designated municipal limits already provided with roads, water supply, sewerage connections and so on.

For rural areas, the newly approved notification adds a sub-category to CRZ-III. The new provision, CRZ-III A, applies development restrictions to a much smaller area of 50 metres from the high tide line, compared to the 200 metres that was earmarked as the no development zone (NDZ) earlier for densely populated areas. These are defined as places with a population of 2,161 per sq km as per the 2011 Census. Areas with a population density below that will continue to have 200 metres as the NDZ.

However, for tourism expansion, the new scheme will allow temporary facilities such as shacks, toilet blocks and changing rooms, maintaining only a slim margin of 10 metres from the high tide line.

The system of granting clearances has also been changed. States will have the authority to approve proposals for urban (CRZ-II) and rural (CRZ-III) areas. The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change will grant clearances for ecologically sensitive areas (CRZ-I), and areas falling between the low tide line and 12 nautical miles seaward. The modifications also include demarcation of a 20-metre no development zone for all islands and guidelines to deal with sensitive areas.

The protection of ecologically sensitive areas and the marine environment is the primary objective of coastal regulation, along with the goal of improving the lives of coastal communities.

When the draft of the new CRZ notification was published in 2018, concerns were raised that it ignored two major issues: maintaining a well demarcated hazard line and factoring in the effects of climate change on sea levels. The disastrous impacts of periodic cyclones show that coastlines will become even more vulnerable.

Protection of fishers poses a challenge, since the relaxation of development controls could subject them to severe commercial pressures. The decision to allow construction and tourist facilities closer to the coast may boost employment and grow local business, but without strong environmental safeguards, these could damage fragile ecosystems. Excessive beach lighting is confusing and harmful to some marine species, including migrating turtles.

Tel Aviv believes that improved relations with Riyadh will serve many major strategic goals

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