



NGT upholds environmental clearance to INO

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The NGT in its order rejected the contention of the petitioner and said EAC was right in making the environmental appraisal because the project “involved appraisal at the inter-state level i.e. Tamil Nadu as well as Kerala”. (Express Photo by Tashi Tobgyal/File)

THE NATIONAL Green Tribunal (NGT) has upheld the environmental clearance granted in March this year to the India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO), a major scientific research facility that is proposed to be constructed in Theni district of Tamil Nadu.

The NGT, on Friday, dismissed a petition that challenged the March 26 clearance granted by the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, on the ground that, according to rules and categorisation of the project, it should have been appraised by the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) of Tamil Nadu and not by the EAC.

Incidentally, the SEIAA had refused to assess the project and referred it to the EAC of the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

The NGT in its order rejected the contention of the petitioner and said EAC was right in making the environmental appraisal because the project “involved appraisal at the inter-state level i.e. Tamil Nadu as well as Kerala”. Also, “the project needed to be appraised considering the fact that the INO site was in ecologically sensitive Western Ghats”, and the ministry was in the process of finalising an ecological plan for the entire region in accordance with the suggestions made by the a panel headed by K Kasturirangan for this purpose.

It, however, said that the project could not be implemented till the approval of the National Board of Wildlife was also received. The INO’s application for approval is pending before the National Board of Wildlife for almost a year.

This is the second time that the INO project had landed in the NGT. In March last year, the Chennai bench of the NGT had suspended an

earlier environmental clearance, granted in 2011, because the project fell within 5 km of the Mathikettan Shola National Park in Idukki district and still no application had been moved for the approval from the National Board of Wildlife. At that time, the NGT had directed the project to seek fresh environmental clearance along with an approval from the National Board of Wildlife.

The INO, one of the biggest scientific research facilities being planned in India, would undertake efforts to detect and study neutrinos, one of the most abundant particles in the universe but amongst the least understood.

