

Centre eases FGD norms for power plants, electricity costs to come down

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has relaxed the requirement for mandatory installation of flue gas desulphurisation (FGD) systems at most coal-based thermal power plants, marking a move towards differentiated compliance based on proximity to urban populations and the sulphur content of the coal used. The new framework, finalised after extensive deliberations and multiple independent studies, will restrict FGD mandates only to plants located within 10 kilometres of cities with a population exceeding one million. Plants in critically polluted areas or non-attainment cities will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. All other plants - accounting for nearly 79

per cent of India's thermal power capacity - are now exempted from mandatory FGD installation. Crucially, the relaxed norms are expected to bring down the cost of electricity by 25 to 30 paise per unit. That benefit, say experts, will ultimately flow to consumers. In a high-demand, cost-sensitive economy, the impact could be significant, helping state discoms contain tariffs and reducing the subsidy burden on governments. The financial burden of mandatory FGD retrofiting was previously estimated at over Rs 2.5 lakh crore, or Rs 1.2 crore per MW, with installation timelines of up to 45 days per unit. Several power producers had warned



that this would not only raise costs but also jeopardise grid stability during peak seasons. The decision follows a series of studies by IIT Delhi, CSIR-NEERI and the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), which found that ambient sulphur dioxide levels in most parts of India are well within the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). Measurements across

multiple cities showed sulphur dioxide levels ranging between 3 and 20 µg/m³, significantly below the NAAQS threshold of 80 µg/m³. The studies also questioned the environmental and economic efficacy of a universal FGD mandate in the Indian context. Indian coal typically has a sulphur content of less than 0.5 per cent, and due to high stack heights and favourable meteorological conditions, dispersion

of sulphur dioxide is efficient. The NIAS study warned that retrofitting FGDs nationwide would add an estimated 69 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions between 2025 and 2030 due to increased limestone mining, transportation, and power consumption. FGDs are useful in places with high sulphur coal (like in China or the US), high ambient sulphur dioxide levels and dense urban proximity. Studies show that India does not face these problems at scale, making universal FGD rollout unnecessary, expensive and counterproductive. Industry executives welcomed the decision. "This is a rational, science-based move that avoids unnecessary costs and

focuses regulation where it is most needed," said a senior executive at a leading public sector utility. "More importantly, it will help keep electricity affordable." Officials stressed that the government remains committed to environmental protection, but with a smarter lens. "This is not a rollback. It is a recalibration based on evidence," a senior official said. "Our approach is now targeted, efficient and climate-conscious," the official added. An affidavit incorporating these findings will be submitted shortly to the Supreme Court in the MC Mehta vs Union of India case, where FGD enforcement timelines have been under judicial scrutiny.

FM Sitharaman interacts with students, staff of Ramakrishna Mission Ashram school in Meghalaya

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday visited the Ramakrishna Mission Ashram School in Sohra, Meghalaya, and interacted warmly with the students, teachers and staff members, highlighting the government's continued engagement with educational and livelihood initiatives in the North Eastern region. During her visit, FM Sitharaman explored various facilities at the school, including the Tailoring

and Weaving Centre that operates under the Swavalamban Alternative Livelihood Unit for the East (SALUTE) initiative. She appreciated the efforts being made to provide skill-based training and alternative livelihood opportunities through such centres. The Finance Minister was accompanied by Swami Anuragananda, Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission. Together, they toured the campus and spoke to the school community, acknowledging the positive role of the institution

in the region's development. One of the most touching moments of the visit was her interaction with 90-year-old Kong Lolín Lyndem, who had both studied and taught at the Ramakrishna Mission Ashram School. FM Sitharaman shared a few words with her, appreciating her long association and contribution to the school. Meanwhile, Meghalaya marked a significant milestone in its development journey on Friday as Union Finance Minister Sitharaman inaugurated

and laid foundation stones for multiple key projects worth Rs 1,087.81 crore in the state. Speaking at the Integrated Public Programme held at LARITI - International Centre for Performing Arts and Culture earlier this week, FM Sitharaman praised Meghalaya's steady progress and visionary leadership under Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma. Highlighting the Centre's support, the Finance Minister said that Meghalaya has been allocated a total of Rs 5,400 crore under the Special



Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SACI) scheme. Commending the effective use of funds, she remarked, "I am happy that the government has used the amount effectively for capital assets. I want

to place on record my appreciation for Meghalaya's efforts. The funds are being fully utilised. Some states have struggled to use their entire share, but Meghalaya has made the most of its allocation."

Air India plane crash: Pilots' union seeks to join AAIB probe as observer

The Airline Pilots' Association of India (ALPA) on Saturday raised concerns over the preliminary findings by the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) for blaming pilots of the ill-fated plane for the crash. ALPA India President Captain Sam Thomas urged the government to include them in the ongoing probe into the Air India AI-171 crash, to maintain transparency in the investigation. On June 12, Air India flight AI 171 -- a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner -- went down shortly after taking off from Ahmedabad, killing 260 people, including 241 on board the aircraft, and 19 on the ground. "We feel that the investigation is being driven in a direction presuming the guilt of pilots and we strongly object to this line of thought," Captain Thomas said in a statement.

"We once again request the powers that be to include us even in the capacity of observers so as to provide the requisite transparency in the investigations," he added. Captain Thomas also raised concerns over "the secrecy surrounding these investigations" being done while keeping the pilots in the dark. ALPA also criticised the AAIB for releasing documents without official signatures and called for immediate reform. "We are surprised that a document so crucial has been given to the media without any responsible person signing it. In the wake of the aforementioned points, we once again request the powers that be to include us even in the capacity of observers so as to provide the requisite transparency in the investigations," it said.

"We request the powers that be to include us, even in the capacity of observers, to ensure transparency," the association added.

AAIB report: Don't jump into any conclusions at this stage, says Civil Aviation Minister

Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu said on Saturday that the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB)'s report on the Air India plane crash in Ahmedabad is based on preliminary findings and one should not jump into conclusions till the final report is made public. Speaking to reporters, he said we should not jump into any conclusions over this. "I believe we have the most wonderful workforce of pilots and crew in the whole world. I have to appreciate all the efforts the pilots and crew of the country are putting, they are the backbone of civil aviation," said the Union Minister. "They are the primary resource of civil aviation.



We care for the welfare and well-being of the pilots also. So let us not jump into any conclusions at this stage and wait for the final report," he told reporters. According to Naidu, there are technicalities involved. "It will be very premature to comment on the report. The preliminary has come

in but we have to wait for something concrete to come in," he noted. Minister of State for Civil Aviation, Murlidhar Mohol, also said the report by the AAIB is still preliminary and "we cannot say anything definite at this point". Speaking to IANS on the report by AAIB into the fatal crash of Air India

flight AI 171 -- a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner that went down shortly after take-off from Ahmedabad on June 12, the minister said this is just the preliminary report, and "I believe further investigation is still underway". "However, the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) has done commendable work.

Earlier, if any helicopter accident occurred in the country, we had to send the black box abroad for analysis. Now, we have the facility in our own country," said the minister. Mohol further said that since this is a preliminary report, we cannot say anything definite at this point. According to the AAIB preliminary report, both fuel control switches supplying fuel to the engines of Air India flight 171 were turned off in quick succession, shutting down both the engines. One of the pilots can be heard on the cockpit voice recorder, asking the other why he cut off the fuel, to which the other pilot responded by saying that "he did not", the report mentioned.

India and Iceland share common spirit of innovation, positive energy: Hardeep Puri



India and Iceland may be geographically apart, but the countries share the common spirit of innovation and positive energy to take their people towards a glorious future, Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri, has said. In a post on X social media platform, the minister said he has concluded

a very fruitful and productive visit to Iceland with a dinner graciously hosted for the Indian delegation by Deputy Permanent Secretary of State of Iceland, Bergdis Ellertsdottir. "We were joined by the Icelandic Ambassador to India Amb Benedikt Hoskuldsson and several energy, trade and multilat-

eral experts. Deeply grateful to the people and energy professionals of Iceland for their warmth and hospitality," said Puri. The minister earlier met Kristinn Ingi Larusson, Chief Commercial Officer of CarbFix, an Icelandic carbon capture company that transforms carbon dioxide into stone by injecting it into underground basalt formations. The company is internationally recognised for its innovative, science-based approach to climate mitigation and now offers its technology for industrial CCS applications globally, including in collaboration with Climeworks on

the ORCA direct air capture facility. "India has large basaltic rock formations in west coast where CO2 and water can be injected by industrial units for a permanent carbon capture and storage in a cost effective manner technologies which can play an impactful role in India's journey towards green energy transition under the leadership of PM Modi," the Union Minister highlighted. The meeting in Reykjavik with Arni Hranar Haraldsson, CEO of ON Power, Iceland's largest geothermal energy company, "gave us an insight into how the company

produces both electricity and hot water at the Hellisheiði and Nesjavellir geothermal plants and generates electricity through the Andakilsa hydro station." "We discussed the company's efforts towards sustainability, and in building EV charging infrastructure which encourages both public and commercial stakeholders toward greener transportation solutions," Puri noted. The technologies may have good potential for India as Himalayas have geothermal capacity in Uttarakhand, Himachal and Ladakh, he added.

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Your day today

By Dr C.V.B. Subrahmanyam



Aries: New contacts at the professional front would bring lucrative opportunities. A very demanding approach can create tensions in your love life.



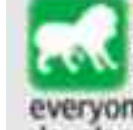
Taurus: A favourable time to start new projects and a happy day of wooing and courtship. Guard against being overly dominating when putting across your views at home.



Gemini: Cultivate a harmonious nature to kill your hatred because it is more powerful than love and deadly affects your body. Romantic influence is strong.



Cancer: The romantic life is becoming interesting. You are observing your love life, as it is blowing hot and cold. Act immediately as tomorrow may be very late.



Leo: You desperately need some activity to keep fit. Festive atmosphere all round keeps everyone in high spirits. On your part develop a harmonious relationship with all and win your opponents by love.



Virgo: Visit those who are less fortunate than yourself and help them with their personal problems. Loved ones will be hard to get along with. Group events will be far too expensive for you to organize.



Libra: Romantically a glittering bait awaits you to be trapped. Your affairs seem to go well on the surface. There are people in the background who don't wish you well in love. Stomach issues may rise.



Scorpio: Some of you will need to keep your temper under control, even under grave provocation. Your childish approach can thwart your romantic aspirations.



Sagittarius: You will have to do something different to make your lover enjoy your company. Your efforts at work get recognized, so cash in on this development.



Capricorn: Good earning will make you splurge on the romantic front. Speculative activities should be avoided. Those burdened with work will have to do something about the resulting fatigue.



Aquarius: Think wisely before loaning money to a friend as early return is not foreseen. Help and assistance will be forthcoming from close ones in getting a matrimonial alliance for the eligible.



Pisces: Monetary gains will keep you in a buoyant mood. This is the day when you can find everything topsy-turvy on the professional front. Those in private companies can face a salary cut.

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