

Brick kiln leases: Saharanpur DM orders probe

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MEERUT: After receiving a legal notice on violation of norms for allotting brick kiln mining leases in the district, DM of Saharanpur Pramod Pandey has set up an inquiry into the matter.

Recently, a local social activist Amit Lamba served a legal notice on the DM seeking that he order an inquiry in the matter. Under the provisions the Mines and Minerals Act, 1957, before granting mining lease, the mining officer, Pankaj Singh, has to certify that there is no other existing mining lease within the periphery of 500 meters from the proposed land for which permission is sought, he said.

According to Lamba, the distance between two fields where the leases have been allotted is not even 50 meters. As a proof, he furnished a Google map of a village depicting a number of earth excavation sites close to each other.

Soon after receiving the notice, DM Pandey stalled the crucial District Environment Impact Assessment Authority (DEIAA) from going ahead with granting the leases after issuing environment clearances.

On his part, mining officer Singh said, "I refute all these charges but yes, a special team will certainly visit these mining fields and inspect ground zero. I will come out clean."

Speaking to TOI, DM Pandey said, "I have already instituted an inquiry into the matter. The team will visit the location personally and will submit that a report to me."

Giving details, Lamba said, "Until 2014, all 180 brick kilns in the district were operating illegally as no one had obtained environmental clearance (EC) though it was a requirement mentioned in Environment Impact Assessment (EIA), 2006 notification. After a Supreme Court directive in 2014, central government created a district environment assessment committee (DEAC) and DEIAA for proper monitoring of mining in 2016. The district mining officer is the head of DEAC who recommends EC to DEIAA which approves it. Now, mining officer Pankaj Singh, in so many cases has certified that most of the brick fields are at a distance of at least 500 meters (a statutory requirement to grant EC) from each other which is actually wrong on his part. At Chawatpur village for instance, the distance between two mining fields is not even 50 meters."