Punjab's New Mining Policy

Why in news?

The Punjab government has come up with the new sand and gravel mining policy 2021.

What is new sand and gravel mining policy 2021?

- The Punjab government had recently come up with the new sand and gravel mining policy 2021.
- Several farmers were already into illegal sand mining in their fields.
- The new law states that landowners can dispose of ordinary earth extracted or removed during the levelling of their Agricultural fields up to 3-feet without any environment clearance certificate.
- This will cause irreparable damage to their soil quality and thus affect productivity

Are farmers opting to mine after the new policy?

- Sand dealers revealed that farmers are very much interested in mining their land especially after harvesting of wheat.
- It is a lucrative business and they are getting a good amount.
- Farmers earn Rs 9 to 11 lakhs from single acres of land.
- Farmers see the short term gains and they are not aware of the adverse consequences.
- This practice is quite common in Hoshiarpur's Mukerian subdivision.

What will happen to soil if mining is done?

- According to experts the top layer of the soil (up to 60 cm) contains all the important nutrients. The first 6 inches are the most important one.
- Mining it would permanently destroy the most fertile layer. It will take hundreds of years to form it again.
- These low lying fields would turn into a drain for high lying areas leading to water logging issues.
- Though farmers put too much fertilizer to improve fertility there was very low organic matter in these mined lands.
- A house can be made from the unproductive soil but crops cannot be grown in non fertile soil.
- Sand mafia earns much more than what they are pay to farmers.

How can farmers save the top layer in case of mining?

- Primarily farm land should not be mined.
- However, if they want to opt for mining, the top layer must be collected on one side of the field.
- It should be spread on the field after mining the bottom layers to retain the best quality sand.

What the earlier law says about mining of farm lands?

- Earlier, farmers were required to take environment clearance for mining their fields.
- No agricultural land can be excavated up to 3-meters even after procuring environment clearance certificate.
- If this rule was flouted an FIR was to be registered against the owner of the land.

What needs to be done?

- When the government acquires any farm land for development projects they should transfer the upper layer to agricultural fields instead of burying the same under metalled road.

Reference

1. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-in-punjabs-new-mining-policy-a-big-gain-for-farmers-and-a-big-loss-7701902/

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