

## **Australian PM Tony Abbott under attack for pro-Adani statement**

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**Melbourne:** Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott has come under attack for candidly speaking in favour of Indian mining major Adani's \$16.5 billion coal mine project in central Queensland which received a setback after the federal court set aside the project approval.

New South Wales Bar Association president Jane Needham expressed concern at Abbott's remarks and said: "These comments demonstrate a lack of understanding of the independent role of the courts in our democracy."

"The courts exist to make decisions according to the law, not to further the interests of particular individuals or organizations, including government. They are an independent arbiter of disputes, and politicians need to understand and respect their non-partisan role," she said.

Needham said courts were not the servant of the government, and "any such implication is inimical to the basic principle of the separation of powers", which is fundamental to the Westminster system.

She said it was critical that courts made decisions on the basis of the legislation they were charged to interpret, and the facts of each case before them.

"Legislation imposes strict conditions on developments such as coal mines, and the courts' task in these circumstances is to scrutinise the executive's actions to ensure that any approvals fall within legislative parameters," she said.

On Wednesday, Adani's environmental authority was set aside after the federal court found that environment minister Greg Hunt had not properly considered advice about two threatened species – the yakka skink and the ornamental snake in the Galilee basin.

Following the revocation, Abbott said the project was "vitally important" and that "sabotaging" such developmental plans using legal means was "dangerous" for the country.

Ellen Roberts, coordinator of Mackay Conservation Group, that launched the legal challenge against the Adani proposal, said the Abbott government had launched a "savage attack" on her group and the nation's environmental laws.

She said the laws on which the case was based should not be changed.

"The legal system is in place to protect us and the world around us. Clearly the government thinks it is above the law," Roberts said.

Reacting to Abbott's comment on Adani mine project, Australian opposition leader Bill Shorten said Abbott should concentrate on his day job, and not act as "commentator in chief" on federal court matters.

"I don't think it is right that the leader of this nation is now second-guessing our judges," he said, adding "Abbott seems to be creating a new test for environmental protection in this country that near enough is good enough. Well it's not."

- PTI