

89k hectares of forest land diverted for development projects in 5 years

TNN | Apr 7, 2023, 06.06 AM IST



NEW DELHI: India during the last five years diverted over 88,903 hectares of forest land — a size more than the area of Mumbai and Kolkata put together — for non-forestry purpose, with the highest of over 19,424 hectares being for road construction followed by 18,847 hectares for mining, 13,344 hectares for irrigation projects, 9,469 hectares for transmission lines and 7,630 hectares for defence projects.

Responding to a Parliament question of BJP member Sushil Kumar Modi, junior environment minister Ashwini Kumar Choubey informed Rajya Sabha that the Centre allowed these diversions for various development works under the provisions of the Forest (Conservation) Act,1980.

Times View

Sometimes diverting forest land for non-forestry purposes becomes unavoidable. Planting lakhs of saplings cannot immediately compensate for the loss caused to the environment. One hopes, though, that sincere attention has been paid to restorative processes that would lead to afforestation in future.

The data shared by him for the five-year period (April 1, 2018 March 31, 2023) show that the Centre had taken decisions for diversions for over 25 kinds of projects/ works including those concerning railways (4,769 hectares), thermal power plants, solar power works and drinking water facilities among others.“The term ‘forest cover’ refers to all lands, more than one hectare in area with a tree canopy density of more than 10%, irrespective of ownership and legal status.

Such lands may not necessarily be a recorded forest area. It also includes orchards, bamboo and palm. All lands covered in the definition of forest cover have certain ecological or biodiversity value,” said Choubey in his written response. As per India State of Forest Report 2021, the area under ‘very dense forest’ is 87,742 sq km, while ‘moderately dense forest’ has an area of 2,39,564 sq km within the total ‘recorded forest area/green wash area’ of 7,38,373 sq km in the country. The proportion of ‘very dense’ and ‘moderately dense’ forests within the total ‘recorded forest area’ of the country is 44. 33 %.