

Modi Government Unlocks Forests For Business
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NEW DELHI: The Centre has recently amended the Forest Conservation Act, watering down the law of private entities to establish the commercial plantations on both private and government-regulated forest land, in a pursuit that began in 2015.

The amendment is the culmination of the government's dogged pursuit, which began shortly after coming to power, to unlock forests for commercial exploitation.

Official documents accessed by The Reporters' Collective trace the origins of this pursuit back to 2015, when the government prepared a scheme that incentivises private entities to go for plantations on degraded forest land and non-forest land, and then allowing these private plantations to be traded for profit as they are adjusted against compensatory afforestation.

This meant that instead of planting trees on a new patch, an already existing private plantation would be considered as an afforested patch.

The documents shed light on the pivotal role played by a Green Credit Scheme, which incentivised the private entities that have raised the plantation to earn and trade credits, and the evolution of National Forest Policy drafts in 2016 and 2018 that focused on allowing private participation in plantations on forest land to increase the productivity of forests.

Despite being forced to abandon these host of plans after facing strong opposition from environmentalists and the tribal ministry for undermining forest conservation and the rights of tribespeople and forest-dependent communities, the government continued to push through and refine its approach.

Ultimately came the significant 2023 amendment to the Forest Conservation Act.

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