

# Parl panel discusses changes in wildlife protection, forest conservation laws with officials

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New Delhi: Recent amendments to the wildlife protection, forest conservation and biological diversity laws were discussed by the members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology, Environment, Forests and Climate Change with officials of the central and state governments, and their concerns would be reported.

Congress leader and the chairman of the committee, Jairam Ramesh, on Sunday said the panel has concluded its five-day study tour of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), Bandipore and Nagarhole tiger reserves and Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary.

He also noted that the study tours of the parliamentary panels have been restricted to a maximum of 10 days a year, which he said should be flexible.

"The Standing Committee on Science and Technology, Environment, Forests and Climate Change has just completed its 5-day study tour of ISRO in Bengaluru, visit to the Bandipur and Nagarhole Tiger Reserves and Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary, followed by a discussion with officials from the Union Govt, state govts of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, on recent amendments bulldozed through by the Modi government to the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, Forest Conservation Act, 1980 and the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, on which there were and continue to be serious concerns.

"Assurances were given that these concerns will be addressed in the Rules. But the current design of the Committee system is such that it doesn't allow the Standing Committee concerned to examine the Rules," Ramesh said in a post on X.

"Our Committee will be submitting its observations and recommendations shortly," he added.

The Congress leader pointed out that the standing committees can embark on study tours for a maximum of 10 days in a year.

"My own view is that this limit should be kept flexible because such study tours can be educative and eye-opening for the MPs. It also gives an opportunity for government officials and other stakeholders to interact with MPs in a more informal manner," he said.

In another post on X, the former Union minister said on June 28, 2011, a few days before he moved to the rural development ministry, he had written to the Goa chief minister to agree to have the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary declared as a tiger reserve.

On July 24, 2023, the Goa bench of the Bombay High Court, in response to some petitions, directed the coastal state to declare Mhadei as a tiger reserve, he said, adding that the court gave the Goa government three months to do so.

The Goa government approached the Supreme Court to get the high court order nullified. But on September 25, the apex court refused a stay, Ramesh claimed.

"So now the Goa govt has no option but to notify the Mhadei Tiger Reserve by October 24th, 2023. Of course, like in the case of the cheetah project, the PM will claim credit. But let that be. There is continuity in governance which he never acknowledges," the Congress leader said.

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