

## Recognise the importance of forests

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A recent report in this newspaper, based on an analysis by Vijay Ramesh, a doctoral student at Columbia University, shows that forest land nearly equal to the size of Nagaland has been approved for diversion between 2014 and 2020 or is pending approval for infrastructure and developmental projects. Based on government data, the study found out that the proportion of forest areas cleared since 2014 is over 68% of what was cleared between 1975 and 2014; before 2014, most of the forest diversion was related to encroachments and mining while between 2014 and 2020, it has been mainly mining-led.

While there is little doubt that India needs natural resources for industrial growth and to pull people out of poverty, the State must also consider the ecosystem services that these forests provide to the country, and evaluate whether such large-scale diversion will be beneficial in the long-run. This lack of appreciation of the unseen benefits of forests is also the reason why biodiversity-rich areas have been opened for mining, along with a strong push to rework the environment impact assessment rules.

India's first-ever Assessment of Climate Change over the Indian Region report revealed that the country's average temperature is expected to rise by 4.4 degree Celsius by end-2100; and warned that this would increase stress on ecosystems, farms, and freshwater resources. This, in turn, will have a serious impact on biodiversity, food, water, energy security, and public health. The State needs to understand that forests can deliver economic benefits by mitigating the impacts of the climate crisis. Preserving forests is an effective method of building climate resilience, and realising India's sustainable development goals.

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/editorials/recognise-the-importance-of-forests/story-afGDXHYcq8Xmm43Efu9AK.html>