

'Changes in law enacted to augment forest management'

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Addressing questions over government's intention in bringing amendments to the Forest Conservation Act, environment minister Bhupender Yadav justified the changes in an interview to Vishwa Mohan. Excerpts:What was the need to amend the Forest Conservation Act?

The Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023 has been enacted with a view to augment and strengthen the forest management, remove ambiguity in the applicability of the provisions of the principal act, promote plantation in private lands, achieve the targets envisaged in the National Forest Policy, 1988 and to align with dynamic changes in the ecological, social and environmental regimes during the last four decades. The law was

enacted mainly to regulate the use of forest lands for various non-forest purposes.

How will it exactly help?

The provisions of the amendment act strengthen the management of forests and provide for sustainable development, while improving health, productivity and flow of the ecosystem goods and services for providing better refuge to biodiversity. Promotion of afforestation in the non-forest land will create additional carbon sinks besides reducing the biotic pressure on forests. The provisions also promote people participation in the process of forest conservation besides providing them livelihood opportunities by way of eco-tourism and setting of zoos and safaris etc.

What's the idea behind asking all states and UTs to prepare a consolidated record of all lands within one year?

The one-year period provided in rules is for consolidation of government records, not for providing relief from the purview of the act. The provisions imply that states and UTs have been provided an opportunity to consolidate their records for the purpose of applicability of the Act without evading forest like areas from the purview of the act. Provisions of the Act, as were being applied earlier, will continue to remain applicable in such lands during the period of consolidation of records by the states and UTs.

How will India go for its energy transition without compromising on energy security?

In India's approach on energy transition is based on the need to ensure India's high energy needs for development, including poverty eradication, achieving sustainable development goals and economic growth.

Further, the approach for the country's energy security is based both on the expansion of non-fossil fuel sources for power generation and rational utilisation of fossil fuel resources.

Specific steps for such utilisation include expanding renewables and strengthening the grid and focusing on demand-side management. The National Green Hydrogen Mission alone is expected to result in significant decarbonisation of the economy and reduce dependence on fossil fuel imports.