



Government revisits proposal of 2014 panel on new umbrella green law

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NEW DELHI: Exploring ways to draft a new umbrella green law subsuming all existing environmental legislations, the government has revisited recommendations of the sevenyear old high-level committee that had suggested clubbing Air Act and Water Act with the Environment Protection Act of 1986 while treating laws on forests and wildlife separately.

Though the process to streamline existing green laws through certain amendments had been in progress at the environment ministry for the last couple of years, the recent move was triggered by the Centre's plan to treat this aspect on priority as it figured in the 60-point action plan following the meeting of Prime Minister Narendra Modi with secretaries and ministers last month.

"We have been working on amending the Indian Forests Act (IFA) and the Forest Conservation Act (FCA). A consultation paper on amending FCA, 1980 has already been released, seeking inputs from stakeholders. As far as the single Environment Act is concerned, the recommendations of the 2014 highlevel committee are being minutely studied," said an official.

The committee, chaired by former cabinet secretary T S R Subramanian, had been constituted under the Modi government's first term. It had submitted its recommendation to the ministry in November, 2014.

"It is practically impossible to subsume all environmental laws in one act/legislation. It has never happened anywhere in the world and it is not only impossible to draft such a legislation: implementation will also be impossible. How can provisions with respect to air pollution, water pollution, poaching of wild animals, EIA, and Access and benefit sharing of traditional knowledge be merged together in one law," said Ritwick Dutta of Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment (LIFE).

Dutta, an environmental lawyer, said, "It is important to appreciate that environment is a complex subject and given the environmental challenges, there is need for more specific laws to deal with environmental issues. To subsume all laws in one legislation is in simple words a plan that is designed to fail at the very inception itself."

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