

## NATIONAL

# India ranks third globally in forest area gain: Survey

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NEW DELHI, JANUARY 31, 2022 23:14 IST

UPDATED: JANUARY 31, 2022 23:52 IST

## Madhya Pradesh has largest area under green cover

India has increased its forest area in the past decade and ranks third globally in average annual net gain in forest area from 2010-2020, the Department of Economic Affairs said in the annual Economic Survey. India added an average of 2,66,000 hectares of additional forest area every year during the period.

Forests covered 24% of India's total geographical area accounting for 2% of the world's total forest area in 2020, the Survey said.

The top 10 countries account for 66% of the world's forest area. Of these Brazil (59%), Peru (57%), Democratic Republic of Congo (56%) and Russia (50%) have half or more of their total geographical area under forests.

Among Indian States, Madhya Pradesh with 11% of India's total forest cover, had the largest area under forests in 2021, followed by Arunachal Pradesh (9%), Chhattisgarh (8%), Odisha (7%) and Maharashtra (7%).

Mizoram (85%), Arunachal Pradesh (79%), Meghalaya (76%), Manipur (74%) and Nagaland (74%) were the top five States in terms of highest proportion of forest cover to the geographical area of the State in 2021.

"Much of India's increase in forest cover from 2011-21 is attributed to enhancement in very dense forest cover, which rose by approximately 20% during the period. Open forest cover also improved by 7% cent during the period. Going forward, there is need to further improve forest and tree cover. Social forestry could also play a significant role in this regard," the Survey noted.

The biennial India State of Forest Report, made public this month, elicited criticism from independent experts who questioned the methodology employed to count forests, pointing out that most of the increase in forest cover from 2019-2021 was outside recorded forests and largely consisted of plantations and orchards. Officials in the Environment Ministry in response to media queries said India's definitions of 'forest' and 'tree cover' was consonant with global definitions. However the government concurs that most of the increases in India's forests have occurred outside areas traditionally marked as 'forest' and consists of plantations and orchards.