

Title: Regarding non-clearance of development projects in various States due to Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and steps taken by the Government.

श्री नरेश पुगलिया (चन्द्रपुर) : महोदय, मैं पर्यावरण एवं वन मंत्री का ध्यान अविम्बलीय लोक महत्व के निम्न विषय की ओर दिलाता हूँ और प्रार्थना करता हूँ कि वे इस संबंध में वक्तव्य दें -

"वन (संरक्षण) अधिनियम, 1980 के कारण विभिन्न राज्यों में जनोपयोगी विकासात्मक परियोजनाओं को मंजूरी न दिए जाने के कारण उत्पन्न स्थिति और इस संबंध में सरकार द्वारा उठाए गए कदम ।"

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): At the outset, I want to remind this august House about the healthy traditions, of living in harmony with nature, that is inherent part of our culture.

The close relationship between long term survival of mankind and maintenance of natural forests has always been appreciated by our society.

However, after Independence, the monolithic driven development strategy led to massive diversion of forest land for various non-forestry purposes.

The rate of diversion of forest land was of the order of 1.5 lakh hectare per annum during the period 1950 to 1980 and caused serious national concern.

Having realised that loss of forest cover is a serious national problem where Centre and State has to play positive role, the subject "Forest" was brought from State list to concurrent list by 42nd Constitutional Amendment in 1976.

After putting "Forest" in Concurrent list, Union legislature has occupied only one aspect of this concurrent field namely "Conservation of Forests" by enacting the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 by this august House, while leaving other issues pertaining to conservation and development of forests with the State Government.

The Act has achieved its objective to some extent as the rate of diversion of forest land has been brought to less than 20,000 hectare per year from the pre-1980 level of 1.5 lakh hectare per year.

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister may lay the Statement on the Table of the House.

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Yes, Sir.

*While achieving this goal, the Central Government has also been sensitive to the needs of development. We have constantly been reviewing the progress of decision making on the proposals received for approval under Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.

The Rules and guidelines have been streamlined and simplified and updated from time to time to ensure that decision on a proposal is taken expeditiously without compromising with the spirit of the Act.

Since 1980, 6080 number of proposals for diversion of 4.93 lakhs hectare of forest land have been approved under this Act for various development projects.

From 1997 to 1999, 2953 proposals were received

Of these 2016 proposals have been sanctioned, 247 proposals rejected on merit and 91 are under consideration of the Central Government. Remaining proposals have either been withdrawn by the State Government or could not be decided for want of essential information from the State Governments.

The percentage of projects in which final decision has been taken is about 75%.

The age analysis of various projects reveals that delay in sanction of projects is mainly on account of:

1. The time lag between submission of a project by the user agency and its receipt by the Central Government.
2. Time taken by the State Governments to provide the wanting information.

*Laid on the Table.

3. Compliance of conditions stipulated in the Stage-I approval in particular mutation of non-forest land in favour of the Forest Deptt. And deposition of the cost of compensatory afforestation.

I may like to also mention that user agencies have not evolved acceptable norms for working out the minimum requirement of forest land for various developmental activities.

The problem of not examining the alternatives of the forest land is also there.

This at times lands us to an impasse because of the immense adverse environmental impacts of the project.

The revision of proposals to offset these concerns takes long time.

Some of the initiatives taken by the Central Government to cut short the delay in deciding the projects are:

1. Six Regional Offices have been created in the Country to process proposals of State Government and have been given power to decide cases involving forest land up to 5 hectare (except mining & regularisation of encroachment). All such proposals are to be decided within four weeks from receipt of complete proposals.
2. Senior officers of the Ministry carry out a periodic review of pending cases with the State Governments and the user agencies, so that the discrepancies can be settled. Sometimes, even the Forest Advisory Committee invites the user agency for discussion and clarifications so that a final view on the project can be taken without delay.
3. The State Governments have been persuaded to create land banks for the purpose of compensatory afforestation so that the proposals are not delayed for identification of non-forest land and its mutation in the name of the Forest Deptt.
4. Regional offices have been directed to carry out site inspection where-ever required expeditiously so that the proposals are decided by the Ministry within 90 days of receipt of proposal complete in all respects.
5. It has been emphasised to all concerned that all the wanting information should be sought from the State Governments at a time. Subsequent back referencing has to be avoided.

In my individual capacity, I monitor the progress of all important cases that are brought to my notice by my colleagues and ensure that the projects are attended on priority basis.

After my assuming the office of Minister for Environment and Forests, the Government has received 1284 fresh proposals.

We have been able to issue final approval in respect of 880 proposals and "in-principle approval for 530 proposals.

167 cases have been rejected on merits during this period.

I propose to continue this momentum and clear the backlog as fast as we can.

The State Governments must also respond to the situation and strengthen the infrastructure dealing with the proposals under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.

The user agencies should also be advised to consult the Forest Deptt. right from the stages of project formulation so that subsequent queries and objections can be avoided.

On our part we will endeavour to be innovative and work out strategies to ensure that perfect harmony is maintained between the conservation and development objectives.

MR. SPEAKER : Matters under rule 377 are treated as laid on the Table.

...(Interruptions)