

India records marginal increase in forest cover

India posted a marginal 0.21% rise in the area under forest between 2015 and 2017, according to the biennial India State of Forest Report (SFR) 2017.

- The document says that India has about 7,08,273 square kilometres of forest, which is 21.53% of the geographic area of the country (32,87,569 sq. km).
- Getting India to have at least 33% of its area under forest has been a long standing goal of the government since 1988.

However various editions of the SFR over the years, have reported the area under forests as hovering around 21%.

- So the government also includes substantial patches of trees outside areas designated as forests — such as plantations or greenlands — in its assessment.
- The total tree cover, according to this assessment, was 93,815 square kilometres or a 2% rise from the approximately 92,500 square kilometres estimated in 2015.

Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala topped the States that posted an increase in forest cover.

- “Much of this increase can be attributed to plantation and conservation activities both within and outside the Recorded Forest areas as well as an improvement in interpretation of satellite data,” the survey notes.
- Currently, 15 States and union territories have 33% of their geographical area under forests.
- In India’s north-east however, forest cover showed a decrease; 1,71,306 square kilometres, or 65.34%, of the geographical area was under forest and this was a 630 square kilometre decline from the 2015 assessment.

The category of ‘very dense forest’— defined as a canopy cover over 70% — and an indicator of the quality of a forest, saw a dramatic rise from 85,904 square kilometres to 98,158 square kilometres this year but the category of ‘moderately dense forest’ (40%-70%) saw a 7,056 square kilometre-decline from 2015.

India is ranked 10th in the world, with 24.4% of land area under forest and tree cover, even though it accounts for 2.4% of the world surface area and sustains the needs of 17% of human and 18% livestock population.

The forest survey for the first time mapped 633 districts and relied on satellite-mapping. Earlier this year, the government ceased to define bamboo as a tree to promote economic activity among tribals. The survey found that India’s bamboo bearing area rose by 1.73 million hectares (2011) to 15.69 million hectares (2017).

How can a convict head a party?’

Chief Justice of India (CJI) Dipak Misra questioned the logic behind having a criminal and corrupt person to head a political party, and said such a lapse was a huge blow to the purity of the election process.

- This goes against our judgments that corruption in politics to be ostracised from the purity of elections, he orally observed, addressing the government and the Election Commission (EC).
- A man cannot directly contest in an election, so he constitutes a group of persons to form a political party and contest in an election,” he said.

The court said that banning convicted persons from becoming office-bearers of parties would be in consonance with its past judgments against corrupt politics.

INTERNATIONAL

India, Oman agree to isolate sponsors of terror

India and Oman have agreed to isolate the sponsors of international terrorism.

The declaration on battling terrorism came at the end of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to the country during which both sides acknowledged that there was an “inter-linkage” between the stability of the Gulf region and the Indian subcontinent.

- The two sides also emphasised the need to isolate the sponsors and supporters of terrorism and agreed that the international community should take urgent action against all such entities, which support terrorism and use it as an instrument of policy.

On military cooperation, the joint statement said: The Indian side thanked Omani side for facilitating operational visits by Indian Naval ships and aircraft as well as Indian Air Force aircraft to various Omani ports and airports. The Omani side expressed appreciation of the training facilities provided to the Omani Royal Armed Forces personnel by India.

A total of eight MoUs were signed on health, legal cooperation, tourism and military cooperation. Oman also expressed that it would like its scientists to be trained in Indian space research facilities.