



Forest Conservation Rules

Context:

- The political parties have sparred earlier this week on the latest version of the Forest Conservation Rules.
- Congress spokesperson, Jairam Ramesh, alleged that the latest version of the rules, updated last month, allowed forest land to be diverted to industry without settling questions of the rights of forest dwellers and tribals who resided on those lands.

About the Forest Conservation Rules:

- The Forest Conservation Act (FCA) of 1980 is put into effect in accordance with the Forest Conservation Rules.
- They outline the process to be followed when diverting forest land for non-forestry purposes such as mining, railroad construction, road construction, and highway development.
- The Forest Conservation Act's main objectives are to save forests and animals, prevent State governments from seizing forest property for private ventures, and work toward expanding the area covered by forests.
- The Central government must approve land diverting for forest land that is larger than five hectares. This is done through a specifically formed committee known as the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC).
- This committee looks at whether the user agency, or those who have requested forest land, have provided a compelling argument for the upheaval of that particular parcel of land, whether they have a plan in place to ensure that the ensuing damage — from felling trees in that area, denuding the local landscape — will be minimal, and whether the said piece of land doesn't harm wildlife habitat.
- Once the FAC approves (or rejects) a proposal, it is sent to the State government in charge of the area where the land is located, which is then responsible for ensuring that the requirements of the Forest Right Act, 2006, a separate Act that safeguards the rights of tribal members and forest dwellers to their land, are met.

Current Status:

- The Centre claims that the new regulations "streamline" the approvals procedure.

- The regulations allow for the cultivation of plantations by private parties, who can then sell them to businesses that must satisfy compensating forestation requirements as land.
- The government claims that this will both assist India in increasing its forest cover and address the issue of the States' inability to locate land within their borders for compensatory reasons
- The most recent area of dispute, though it has generated its own debate, is the absence of language in the amended Forest Conservation Rules describing what would happen to indigenous people and communities that live in the forest whose land would be divided up for construction projects.

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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

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