

## Don't say 'diversion' of forest land, say 'reforestation', says Prakash Javadekar

Environment ministry clears 229 projects in a month, up from 217 in a quarter.

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All about thinking positive, says Minister Javadekar.

Wary of the perception that his ministry is clearing too many projects too fast, Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar has asked ministry officials to replace the word 'diversion' of forest land with 'reforestation' in all communications.

An intra-ministry communication issued on July 16 by Javadekar's private secretary Vinay Srivastava stated: "Hon'ble minister has desired that henceforth in all communication the word 'Clearance' should be replaced by 'Approval with Adequate Environmental Safeguards' and the word 'Diversion' should be replaced by 'Reforestation'."

Asked about it, Javadekar said: "For every diversion of forest land for a project, a condition for clearance says that compensatory afforestation on equal area of non-forest land is a must. So ultimately, it is reforestation only. This is all about thinking positive and using the right expression." Until November 2014, a total of 12,05,138 hectares of forest land was diverted for different projects in the country. In October 2002, the Supreme Court directed that a Compensatory Afforestation Fund should be created with the money received from the user-agencies. But compensatory afforestation targets were not met. In 2013, a CAG report pointed out that against the receivable non-forest land of 1,03,381.91 hectares during the period 2006-12 for compensatory afforestation, only 28,086 hectares (27 per cent) was received. Actual compensatory afforestation done over non-forest land received was 7,280.84 hectares or just 7 per cent of the requirement.

Similarly, afforestation over degraded forest land was done only on 49 per cent of the required area. Asked about the backlog, Javadekar blamed "the inefficiency" of the previous UPA government. "We have acquired 20,000 hectares of non-forest land so far for afforestation," he said, conceding that much of this land is yet to be planted with trees. Between July and December 2014, the NDA government diverted more than 16,000 hectares of forest land in only five months.

The instruction to replace 'diversion' with 'reforestation' follows Javadekar's comment on the monthly report of the ministry's achievements and activities in June sent to Cabinet Secretary P K Sinha by Environment Secretary Ashok Lavasa on July 9. A copy of the report was marked to Javadekar on July 10 and he wrote down the desired changes on the margins of this report.

In the monthly report, the list of the ministry's achievements in June started with the number of projects cleared and the extent of forest land diverted. "During the month," wrote Lavasa, "229 projects pertaining to different sectors were given clearances." Only five projects were rejected during the month.

This was significantly higher than the rate of clearance in the first quarter of the new government when the ministry cleared a total of 217 projects in three months.

Lavasa's June report also noted that "57 cases were approved for diversion of 2335 ha of forest land under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980." In comparison, only 1039.27 ha forest land were earmarked for compensatory afforestation during the month.

Source:

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/dont-say-diversion-of-forest-land-say-reforestation-prakash-javadekar/#sthash.RpnOc9kT.dpuf>