

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE

RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 2130
TO BE ANSWERED ON 18.12.2025

Protection of ecologically fragile areas of Himalayan states

2130. SMT. SAGARIKA GHOSE:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE be pleased to state:

- (a) the scale of deforestation that occurred in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand that witness high tourist activity;
- (b) the plans and policies currently in place to protect ecologically fragile areas in the Himalayan States; and;
- (c) the details of curbs and restrictions on tourist activities and tourism infrastructure being considered to protect forests in the Himalayan States?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE
(SHRI KIRTI VARDHAN SINGH)

(a) The Protection and management of forest are primarily the responsibility of the State Governments/Union Territory Administrations. There are legal frameworks for the protection and management of forest resources of the country which include, the Indian Forest Act 1927, Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam 1980, and the State Forest Acts, Tree Preservation Acts and Rules, etc. The State Governments /UT Administrations take appropriate actions to protect forest and tree resources under the provisions made under these Acts/ Rules. As per India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2019 and ISFR 2023 published by Forest Survey of India, there is no significant deforestation in Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh or Uttarakhand. As per the ISFR 2019 and ISFR 2023, Jammu & Kashmir shows a net increase of 224.39 square kilometer, Himachal Pradesh records an increase of 146.35 square kilometer, and Uttarakhand reflects a negligible change of 0.83 square kilometer in forest cover. The comparative data therefore suggest overall stability or improvement in forest cover across these Himalayan States rather than any measurable scale of deforestation.

(b)& (c) The Ministry has issued the Guidelines on Sustainable Eco-tourism in Forest and Wildlife Areas, 2021, to all States/UTs including Himalayan States which lay down a framework of regulatory safeguards to ensure that tourism activities in forested Himalayan regions remain ecologically sustainable. These Guidelines emphasize science-based eco-tourism planning, including mandatory carrying-capacity analysis to restrict the number, timing, duration and mode of tourist visits in forest and wildlife areas. Eco-tourism zones must be specifically demarcated to protect sensitive habitats, breeding areas and tribal habitations, and tourism access is regulated accordingly.

To prevent ecological degradation, the Guidelines prohibit permanent tourism infrastructure on forest land. Only temporary, eco-friendly structures using local natural materials may be permitted, and hotel/resort construction in Eco-Sensitive Zones is governed by strict ESZ notifications and Tourism Master Plans. Further, Tourism plans, as outlined in the Guidelines,

include provisions relating to controls on plastic use, waste management, sewage disposal, noise levels and disaster-risk aspects such as landslides and fires, which hold particular relevance in Himalayan regions. Visitor-related measures in the Guidelines refer to zoning, signage, safety protocols and monitoring arrangements intended to observe ecological stress, limit disturbance to wildlife and address risks of biological invasion and pollution. The Guidelines also indicate the creation of multi-level monitoring committees by States/UTs for oversight of eco-tourism activities and for reviewing adherence to the prescribed framework.
