

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE

LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 352
TO BE ANSWERED ON 02.02.2026

Environmental Crises in Ecologically Sensitive Areas

352. SHRI HANUMAN BENIWAL:

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

- (a) whether the Government acknowledge that uncontrolled, unplanned construction and unscientific infrastructural development are causing serious environmental crises in ecologically sensitive areas, leading to major disasters such as landslides and cloudbursts in several States of the country in recent years particularly in Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh;
- (b) whether construction in the name of tourism infrastructure, hydro projects or other development activities has been permitted in the eco-sensitive zones declared/protected by the Government in various States during the last decade, if so, the details thereof, State/UT-wise;
- (c) whether the Government intends to formulate a clear national policy to prevent uncontrolled construction and environmental degradation in ecologically sensitive areas, if so, the time by which it is likely to be done; and
- (d) if not, the reasons therefor?

ANSWER

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

(a) to (d) The very purpose of declaring Eco-sensitive Zone (ESZ) and Ecologically sensitive Areas (ESA) is to create a kind of “Shock Absorber” for the specialized ecosystems, such as Protected Areas or ecologically important areas forming larger landscapes. These zones act as transition areas between regions of high protection and areas with relatively lesser protection.

Notifying Eco-sensitive Zones/Areas around the Protected Areas is an important measure for management and conservation of wildlife and biodiversity while simultaneously ensuring sustainable development in the surrounding landscapes keeping in view the developmental aspirations of local people. After the publication of final Eco-sensitive Zone notification in the official Gazette, the respective State Governments/Union Territory Administrations are mandated to prepare a Zonal Master Plan within two years in consultation with line departments and in accordance with the stipulations contained in the notification. The Zonal Master Plan regulates developmental activities within the Eco-sensitive Zone by strictly adhering to the list of prohibited, regulated and promoted activities, with an emphasis on eco-friendly livelihood options for local communities.

To prevent uncontrolled and unplanned construction and unscientific infrastructure development in ecologically sensitive areas, activities such as commercial mining, establishment of major hydroelectric projects, setting of industries causing pollution, etc. are prohibited within Eco-sensitive Zones/Areas. The Zonal Master Plan further mandates the identification of vulnerable hill slope areas where construction is not permitted. In addition, construction on steep hill slopes or slopes exhibiting high degree of erosion is not permitted, in order to minimise environmental degradation and to reduce disaster risks. Further, the monitoring committee also oversees the implementation of the provisions of ESZ/ESA notification.
