

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE

LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 3854
TO BE ANSWERED ON 16.03.2026

Diversion of Forest and Agriculture Land

3854. SMT.HARSIMRAT KAUR BADAL:

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

- (a) whether the Government acknowledges the ongoing decline in the acreage of forest and agriculture land across several States in the country particularly in Punjab;
- (b) the details of the factors identified by the Government as contributing to this reduction, such as urbanization, industrial activity, land fragmentation and lack of effective land consolidation policies;
- (c) the specific steps taken by the Government to prevent further diversion of forest and agriculture land for non agricultural purposes and the extent to which these measures have been effective in reversing the trend; and
- (d) the steps proposed to be adopted by the Government to prevent misuse of rural agriculture land in the name of drastic urbanization?

ANSWER

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

- (a) to (d) Forest Survey of India (FSI), Dehradun, an organization under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, carries out the assessment of forest and tree cover of the country biennially and the findings are published in the India State of Forest Report (ISFR). The forest cover assessment is a wall to wall mapping exercised based on remote sensing supported by intensive ground verification and field data from the National Forest Inventory.

As per ISFR 2023, the Recorded Forest Area (RFA) of the country is 7,75,377 square kilometer, constituting 23.59% of the geographical area. As per ISFR 2021, RFA was 7,75,288 square kilometer, constituting 23.58% of the geographical area. The comparison indicates that there is increase of 89 square kilometer of RFA between ISFR 2021 and ISFR 2023. Further, there is no decline in the Recorded Forest Area of the State of Punjab between ISFR 2021 and ISFR 2023.

As per the latest report on 'Land Use Statistics-at a Glance 2023-24', despite marginal decline in cultivable/agricultural land, the Net Sown Area has remained relatively stable over the years. Further, the Gross Cropped Area has expanded significantly, rising from 201.3 million hectares in 2013-14 to 217.8 million hectares in 2023-24.

The Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980 (earlier the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980) has been enacted to provide for the conservation, protection and sustainable management of forest land in the country. The Act regulates the diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes and mandates prior approval of the Central Government for such diversion, thereby ensuring that forest resources are safeguarded and any use of forest land is subject to strict scrutiny and appropriate mitigation measures such as compensatory afforestation and other conservation safeguards.

Land and agriculture are the state subjects, as per Entry No. 18 of List II (State List) of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India, land falls under the jurisdiction of State Governments, which are responsible for taking appropriate measures to increase the area under cultivation and prevent the diversion of agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes. However, the Government of India supports these efforts through policy initiatives and budgetary assistance.

Department of Land Resources is implementing Watershed Development Component of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (WDC-PMKSY) which primarily focuses on development rainfed/ degraded lands. The activities undertaken in the scheme, inter alia, include ridge area treatment, drainage line treatment, soil and moisture conservation, rainwater harvesting, nursery raising, pasture development, livelihoods for asset-less persons etc. The measures taken under WDC-PMKSY supplements the effort of the Government to increase the area under cultivation. This scheme has been approved by the Government on 15th December, 2021.

Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has developed several technological measures to increase the area under cultivation. This includes location specific bio-engineering to check soil erosion due to run-off of rainwater, sand dune stabilization and shelter belt technology to check wind erosion and reclamation technology for problem soils in the country. ICAR has also developed the gypsum technology package, consisting of land levelling, bunding, flushing, removal of excess water, good quality irrigation water, application of amendments, selection of crops and efficient nutrient management. ICAR also recommends several agronomic measures to improve the degraded soils and bringing them under crop cultivation, soil test based balanced and integrated nutrient management through conjunctive use of both inorganic and organic sources (manner, biofertilizers etc.) of plant nutrient and location specific soil & water conservation measures for preventing deterioration of soil health and fertility.

The Central Government has enacted the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation & Resettlement (RFCTLARR) Act, 2013, which came into force on 01.01.2014. Under this act, land can be acquired for public purposes. Section 10 of the Act explicitly restricts the acquisition of multi-crop irrigated land, unless in exceptional cases where no alternative land is available. In such cases, equivalent wasteland must be developed for agriculture. Data on conversion of agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes is maintained at the State level, as land is a State subject under the Constitution. However, the RFCTLARR Act, 2013, strongly discourages such conversions unless absolutely necessary. Wherever agricultural land is acquired, compensatory mechanisms, including monetary compensation, rehabilitation and resettlement benefits, and in some cases, land for land compensation, are provided to mitigate the impact on farmers.

