



Coming, a law to empower forest staff

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Draft sent to key State forest officers for comments; not made public yet

- A proposed legislation accords significant powers to India's forest officers — including the power issue search warrants, enter and investigate lands within their jurisdictions, and to provide indemnity to forest officers using arms to prevent forest-related offences.
- The Indian Forest Act, 2019 is envisaged as an amendment to the Indian Forest Act, 1927 and is an attempt to address contemporary challenges to India's forests.
- The draft law has been sent to key forest officers in the States for soliciting comments and objections until June 7, says an accompanying note by the Union Environment Ministry.
- Officials at the Union Environment Ministry said that the draft was "preliminary," "extremely pro-people" and explicitly provided for traditional forest dwellers to jointly manage forests with officers.
- "Village forests", according to the proposed Act, may be forestland or wasteland, which is the property of the government and would be jointly managed by the community through the Joint Forest Management Committee or Gram Sabha.
- The legislation also proposes a forest development cess of up to 10% of the assessed value of mining products removed from forests, and water used for irrigation or in industries which would be deposited in a special fund and used "exclusively for reforestation; forest protection and other ancillary purposes connected with tree planting, forest development and conservation.

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