

RS. 47,436 CRORE RELEASED FOR AFFORESTATION

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA

Seed capital: A forest employee making seed balls at the Ahmadpur Forest Nursery in Bhopal. A.M. Faruqi

The Union Environment Ministry on Thursday transferred Rs. 47,436 crore to 27 States for afforestation. These are long-pending dues part of the Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF), a Rs. 54,000 crore tranche that has been collected for nearly a decade as environmental compensation from industry, which has razed forest land for its business plans.

Economic value

The amount to be paid by industry depends on the economic value of the goods and services that the razed forest would have provided. These include timber, bamboo, firewood, carbon sequestration, soil conservation, water recharge, and seed dispersal. Industrialists pay this money and this is eventually transferred to the States concerned to carry out afforestation.

Only a fraction of this corpus had actually been disbursed to States, due to the lack of a legal framework and instances of States using it for non-forestry purposes.

Independent authority

The CAF Act 2016, which came into being more than a decade since it was devised, established an independent authority — the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority — to execute the fund.

However, it was not until last August that the rules governing the management of the fund were finalised.

Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar, while presenting cheques to senior officials in State forest administration, said the Centre would use geographic tagging technology to keep a tab on whether States were using their allotted funds appropriately.

“The Fund will be used as per provisions of the CAF Act and Rules. These include catchment area treatment, wildlife management, forest fire prevention, soil and moisture conservation work in the forest...it cannot be used for payment of salary, travelling allowances, making buildings and buying office equipment for forest officers. We will use electronic repositories, geographical tagging for tracking expenses,” he added.

Odisha top recipient

Odisha, the top recipient of funds, got nearly Rs. 6,000 crore followed by Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh with Rs. 5,791 crore and Rs. 5,196 crore respectively.

Kerala got the least with Rs. 81.59 crore.

Activists and environmentalists have raised concerns that the funds are used by the State to ride roughshod over tribal rights and unscientific afforestation methods were often implemented to make good razed forests.

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