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Forest cover in hill states reduced due to upgrade of infra, health facilities: Minister

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Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav Thursday said forest cover in some of the hill states such as Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) had reduced due to upgrade of infrastructure and health facilities. Yadav told the Parliament that onus was on the Centre to make health facilities and roads available to every village.

He said this while responding to a query raised by Rajya Sabha MP Ranjeet Ranjan. The MP stated that though the forest cover had reduced in hilly terrains of the country, the government was sanctioning more projects in those areas.

“It is the responsibility of the government to make roads and healthcare facilities available to the common man. In Arunachal Pradesh, roads have to be made to the remotest corner. According to the Forest Survey of India (FSI) report, no forest cover has been reduced in Uttarakhand,” Yadav said.

According to the FSI report, green cover in Jammu and Kashmir has reduced to 21,387 sq km in 2021 from 23,241 sq km in 2017. In Arunachal Pradesh, the forest cover reduced to 66,431 sq km in 2021 from 66,964 sq km in 2017. Similarly, forest cover also declined in Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland.

Ranjan said while the government talks about protecting the forests, these were being destroyed in the name of development projects. She said the government should protect the Bhagirathi eco-sensitive zone, which comes in the Chardham project.

Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari said out of the total of 900-km Chardham project, only a 150-km of stretch remains to be constructed. He said the government would take care of the Bhagirathi eco-sensitive zone.

The Chardham project is a road widening project to ensure all-weather connectivity among four shrines — Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath — in the hill state. The ~12,000-crore project was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2016.

“The stretch is important from the strategic point of view. It is going up to the China border. Both national and ecological interests will be protected. Consultants from Switzerland had prepared the detailed project report. No trees will be axed,” Gadkari said. The project, which was originally slated to be finished by 2020, got delayed after an NGO filed a petition citing ecological damage due to the road widening project in 2018.

Green cover declines in J&K: Report

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Source: <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/j-k/forest-cover-in-hill-states-reduced-due-to-upgrade-of-infra-health-facilities-minister/>