India aims to restore 26 MN hectares of degraded and deforested land: what it means

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At a time when the PM Narendra Modi-led government is facing criticism for making it easier for companies to get environmental clearance, even inside protected areas, Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Prakash Javadekar has said that India has a culture of not just conserving and protecting nature, but living in harmony with it.

Speaking at the Biodiversity Summit at United Nations, he said that India has enhanced the forest and tree cover to 24.56 per cent in the last decade.

India green cover enhanced to 24.56%

"In the course of last decade, India has enhanced the combined forest and tree cover to 24.56 per cent of the total geographical area of the country," he said.
He further said India aims to restore 26 million hectares of degraded and deforested land and achieve land-degradation neutrality by 2030.

"India has operationalized a system for access and benefit-sharing provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity through a national network of 250,000 Biodiversity Management Committees
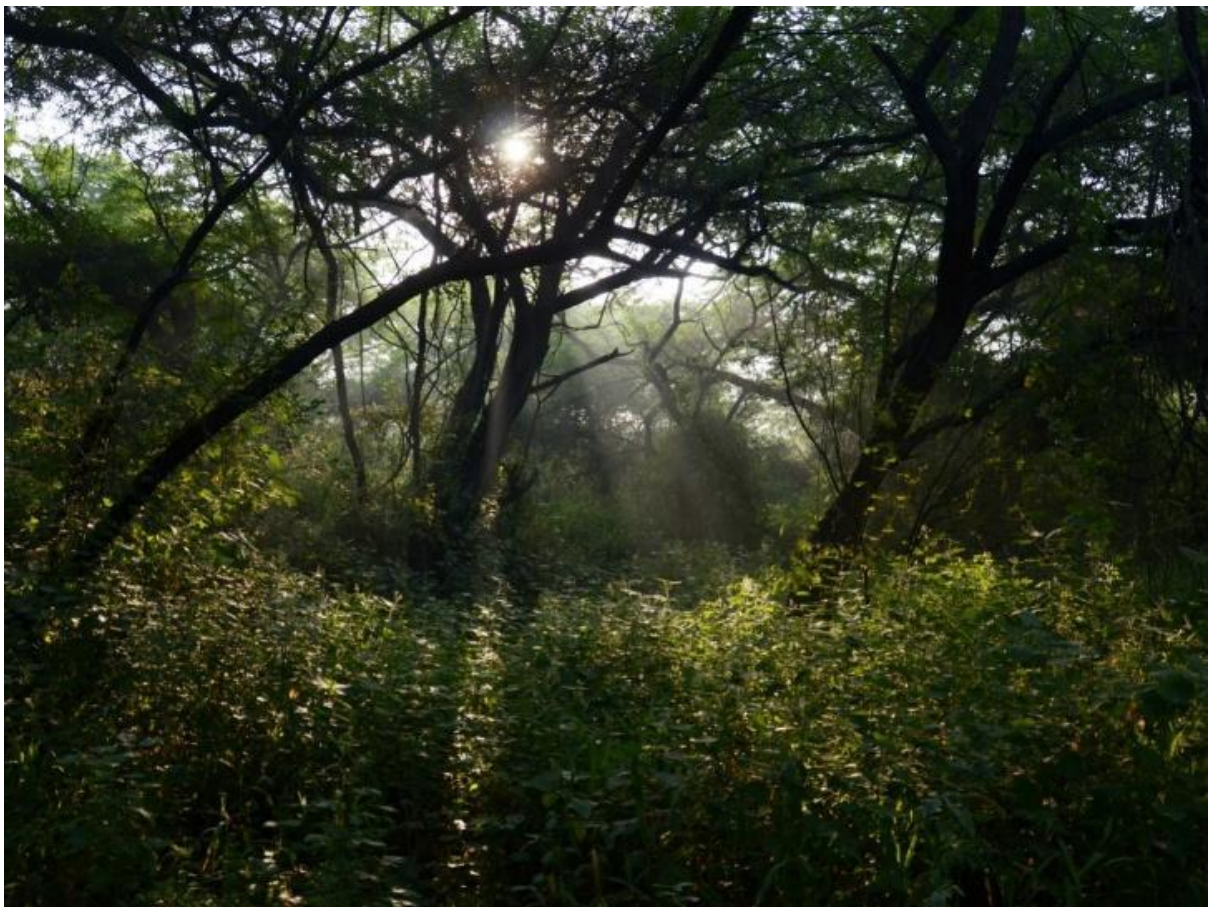
across the country involving locals and 170,000 Peoples Biodiversity Registers for documentation of biodiversity," he said.

Highest number of tigers in the wild

India has the highest number of tigers in the wild and the number has doubled ahead of the 2022 deadline, the Union Minister stated.

The post-2020 global biodiversity framework that will be adopted at the 15th Conference of Parties to the CBD in 2021 provides a good opportunity to enhance efforts to conserve and protect nature, the Union Minister said.

"India has already taken a leadership role in order to conserve biodiversity by organizing two Conference of Parties (CoPs) within a span of less than a year," he said. "We organized CoP 14 of UNCCD during September 2019 in New Delhi, followed by CoP 13 of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) in Gandhinagar during February 2020."

While the government has been for some time claiming that the forest cover in the county has increased, the reality is that the 'tree cover' has reduced.

That is because the Forest Survey of India (FSI) has listed any land with a 10 per cent tree canopy as a forest.

Forests are broadly classified as 'very dense forests' (VDF), 'moderately dense forests' and 'open forests'. Most of the very dense forests are within the Recorded Forest Area (RFA), which is under control of the state forest departments.

However, 'tree cover' is defined as "tree patches outside recorded forest areas exclusive of forest cover and less than the minimum mappable area of one hectare".

The latest FSI survey report states that there has been an increase of 4,306 sq km of 'forest cover' outside the RFA/GW area compared to the previous assessment in 2017. It also stated that forest cover within the RFA/GW zone has shown a slight decrease of 330 sq km (0.05 per cent).

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