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India has lost the second-largest forest area among all countries in five years

An increase in population and the push for big infra projects led to deforestation

Photo: Babu Babu (Reuters)

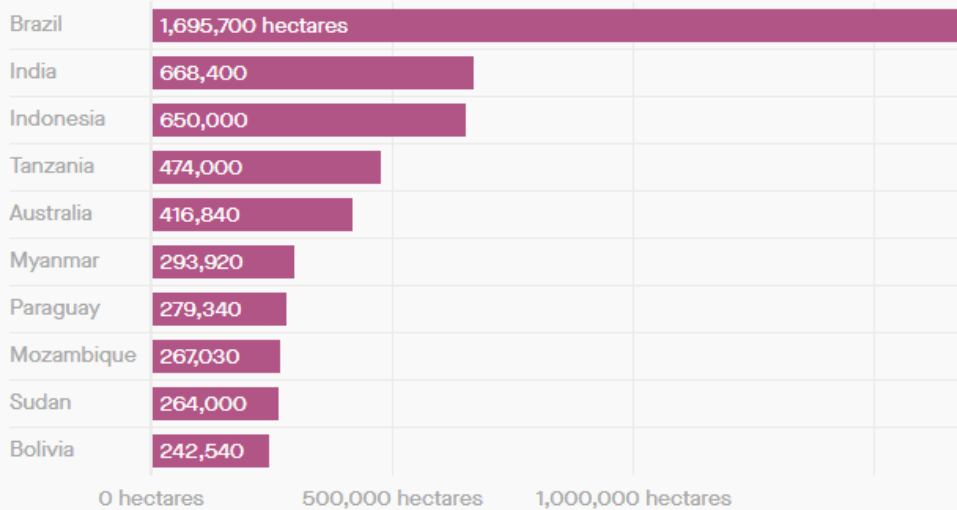
By **Mimansa Verma**

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India lost 668,400 hectares (ha) of jungles on average between 2015 and 2020, a new report has said.

The is only second to the scale of deforestation in Brazil, noted [the report](#) released last month by Utility Bidder, a UK-based utility costs comparison firm. Brazil lost nearly 1.7 million hectares of forest between 2015-2020, as climate change adversely affected forest growth.

Average deforestation between 2015-2020



Quartz | qz.com | Data: Utility Bidder report

Utility Bidder’s report analyzed deforestation trends in 98 countries over the past 30 years.

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“As the country with the second largest population in the world, India has had to compensate for the increase in residents—this has come at a cost in the way of deforestation,” the report stated. Since prime minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014, his government has given an impetus to stalled projects approved under his predecessor, besides launching fresh ones. For this, vast areas of forestry needed to be cleared.

India’s infrastructure push

In the five years since 2018, India’s environment ministry has earmarked around 88,903 hectares of forest land for non-forestry purposes such as transmission lines, railways, and defence projects, junior minister Ashwini Kumar Choubey told parliament earlier this month.

Of this, the largest share of 19,424 hectares was diverted towards road construction, followed by 18,847 hectares for mining and 13,344 hectares for irrigation projects.

Such development projects have come at the cost of environmental degradation, resulting in lethal disasters, experts said.

In January this year, land subsidence in the sub-Himalayan town of Joshimath affected nearly 20,000 people. The town in the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand is a key gateway to several mountain expeditions, trekking trails, and pilgrim centres.

Many environmentalists are of the view that this crisis was a result of the hydropower projects undertaken in and around Joshimath.

To compensate for the loss of forests, a tree-planting drive would be carried out, minister Choubey had said in parliament.

However, a report published by The Indian Express newspaper in March showed that even existing numbers for India’s forest cover might not be reliable.

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“...bungalows of ministers and senior officers, the Reserve Bank of India building and parts of the campuses of AIIMS and IIT in Delhi are classified as ‘forests’ in official maps. It shines a light on the ambiguities and grey areas that could prevent the country’s afforestation programme from achieving its potential,” the report said.



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While most of the cities of India are gasping for breath n has a poor to severe air regime,govt in its ‘wisdom’ of ‘growth’ proposes to CHOP over 2.3 million (23 lakh) trees. Do we realize that we r building a breathless nation? Why can’t we ‘build’ around trees n not over them?

2.3mn trees to be cut for mega infra projects in country, House told

Jayashree Nandi

letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Around 2.3 million trees will be removed to set up mega infrastructure projects in the country, the Union environment ministry informed the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

“Over the last three years (2020 to 2022), about 31 projects related to highways, 11 projects related to ports, 15 projects related to airports, 20 projects related to river valley and 10 pro-



After removing the trees, compensatory plantation will be carried out as per norms, the government said. HT

of projects for which the clearances were given; the number of

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 Richard P. Vlosky, Ph.D.
*Crosby Land & Resources Endowed Professor of Forest Sector Business Development
 Director, Louisiana Forest Products Development Center
 Room 227, School of Renewable Natural Resources
 Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803
 Phone (office): (225) 578-4527; Mobile Phone: (225) 223-1931
rvlosky@agcenter.lsu.edu*

Chair, Agricultural Faculty Council, LSU AgCenter/College of Agriculture

Scientific Board Member (<https://www.forest-journal.com/>)

