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## State government passes resolution to reject India's controversial new forest act

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A state government in India has issued an official resolution as a protest against the forest act recently passed by the federal parliament, amid concerns it could drive deforestation and biodiversity loss.

The Mizoram state minister for environment, forests, and climate change, Pu TJ. Lalnuntluanga, submitted the official resolution on Tuesday in opposition to the Forest Conservation Amendment Act of 2023, which was passed by the Indian parliament earlier this month.

According to local media, the minister said that the state government had been against the bill since the beginning and had conveyed this to the central government numerous times but the efforts had yielded no results.

“This House unanimously resolves to oppose the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023 in order to protect the rights and interest of the people of Mizoram,” the statement said.

The statement is the highest-level show of opposition to the law to date, even as a large number of experts and conservationists opposed it when the legislation emerged as a draft two years ago.

Experts doubted, however, that Mizoram's action would have much impact given the law has been passed federally, but said it marked important opposition against a law many say will increase deforestation in India while the parliamentary process ahead of its approval included committees ignoring expert advice.

“The state’s resolution can be interpreted as a powerful political objection to the legislation passed by the central government, particularly since the concerns they raised weren’t effectively considered by the Joint Parliamentary Committee,” Debadityo Sinha, the lead for climate and ecosystems at the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, told Carbon Pulse.

The Forest Amendment Act 2023 redefines the term “forest” under the Indian law, effectively removing legal protections for certain types of forests.

Further, it removes state governments’ authority to protect forests from infrastructure projects such as the construction of roads, railways, and highways if they are located within 100 km of the national border, citing security concerns.

Mizoram, located in the easternmost part of India, fears the new law will be destructive as the state shares its border with Myanmar and Bangladesh.

According to central government records, Mizoram is home to “rare, threatened, and endangered plant and animal species”, and experts have raised concerns that the push for infrastructure projects will prove devastating for the local ecology at such biodiversity hotspots.

However, in the one-page resolution submitted on Tuesday, the state government did not specifically disclose its reasons for opposing the law.

“While we await specific reasons behind the state’s resolution, there seems to be a valid apprehension that the numerous exemptions and relaxations could potentially result in substantial deforestation,” Sinha added.

“[T]his could lead to the erosion of vital ecosystem services for the people of Northeast India, who have a deep cultural and traditional bond with their forests.”

Mizoram’s reaction to the law was the opposite of that of the state of Odisha, which earlier this month issued a directive to all officials ordering them to ensure that so-called “deemed” forests were no longer excluded from non-forestry activity, and were open for development.

However, the Odisha state government had to **put the order on hold** (<https://carbon-pulse.com/216939/>) following a backlash from experts who were demanding revisions to the passed act.

The controversy comes as India has pledged to increase its forest cover to 1 million square kilometres in 2030 as part of its carbon emissions commitments under the Paris Agreement, up from around 800,000 sq. km currently.

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