

## **Two ministries spar over new bamboo rule**

A new rule that gives preference to forest dwellers over wildlife has sparked off a tiff between two Union ministries.

The forest bureaucracy of the environment ministry has raised the alarm over a new rule notified by the tribal affairs ministry, which allows the gram sabha to regulate bamboo harvesting. The environment ministry has said such a move would sound the death knell for Indian wildlife, including tigers and elephants.

The forest department of the states had been regulating harvesting of bamboo since 1927, when the Indian Forest Act was notified. However, the power was transferred to the gram sabha under the new Forest Rights Act.

Unlike the Indian Forest Act, which categorised bamboo under timber and therefore stipulated regulation by the government, the new law called it as minor forest produce.

Around 13.96 million hectares – or one-fifth of the country's forest area – accommodates bamboo trees. Besides being a principal source of food for elephants and some ungulates, it provides cover to terrestrial birds, reptiles and small mammals.

The main area of concern of the forest bureaucracy is a new rule that does not provide for any limitation on how much bamboo can be harvested, and talks only of its management plan.

"It is a recipe for ecological disaster," said a senior Indian Forest Service official, adding that it would increase human-animal conflict and reduce green cover for wildlife.

Secretary environment T Chatterjee and DG of forests PJ Dalip Kumar had suggested a restriction saying that naturally fallen bamboo should be declared minor forest produce for locals to harvest. Remaining bamboo should remain under the control of the forest departments, they said in an official communication to the environment minister Jayanthi Natarajan.

But, the tribal affairs ministry ruled out any change saying the new rules have been notified after consultation with various stakeholder ministries.