

Ramesh's project clearance pace fastest ever, says CSE

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NEW DELHI: Rural development minister Jairam Ramesh as environment minister was not anti-industry as labelled by his cabinet colleagues. In fact, the pace of clearances during his two-year tenure was the fastest since 1981, when environment ministry got the job of clearing projects.

A study released by non-government organisation, Centre for Science and Environment, says his ministry allowed diversion of 1.53 lakh of forestland, which was about 19% of the total forest area diverted for the development projects in the last three decades.

THE MAXIMUM AREA OF FORESTLAND DIVERTED WAS IN 2010. RAMESH WAS HEADING THE MINISTRY BETWEEN JUNE '09 AND JULY '11

The maximum area of forestland diverted in a year—14,500 hectares—was in 2010. Ramesh was in-charge of the ministry between June 2009 and mid-July 2011, when he was replaced with Jayanthi Natarajan.

The CSE study contradicts the claims of Ramesh's cabinet colleagues such as coal minister Shriprakash Jaiswal and power minister Sushil Kumar

Shinde, who blamed his environment ministry for blocking key infrastructure projects. The environment ministry had a high score—99% on environment clearance and 94% on forest clearance—on projects received for nod in the last five years.

Around 2.04 lakh hectares of forestland, equal to four tiger reserves of the size of Panna in Madhya Pradesh or Tadoba in Maharashtra, was diverted since 2006, the CSE report said.

A large portion of forestland diverted was for mining and power projects. "The ministry instead of protecting has acted impediment to environment," said CSE director-general Sunita Narian.