

Tobacco violations constitute 80% of environment offences

Indianexpress, dt: 16.5.26, pg. no. 12

USHA PERI @ Visakhapatnam

FROM disappearing forests and polluted rivers to poaching, illegal hunting and wildlife trafficking, environmental offences continue to unfold quietly across the country, often far away from public attention.

Yet, the latest National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data shows a sharp decline in environment-related crimes in India during 2024, raising an important question.

India recorded 57,670 environment-related offences in 2024, a decline from 68,994 cases reported in 2023, according to the latest NCRB data. While the numbers suggest a downward trend, environmentalists and conservation experts warn the statistics reveal more about gaps in reporting and enforcement than the actual scale of ecological and wildlife crimes taking place across the country.

The NCRB data, compiled under various laws including the Wildlife Protection Act, Forest Conservation Act, Environment Protection Act and Noise Pollution Rules, paints a mixed picture of environmental governance in India.

Tamil Nadu reported the highest number of environment-related offences in the country with 26,475 cases in 2024; the state had recorded a much higher 41,304 cases the pre-

vious year. Rajasthan followed with 10,824 cases, while Kerala registered 9,143 and Maharashtra 6,735 cases.

Several States, however, reported extremely low figures. Odisha, Nagaland and Sikkim reported zero environment-related offences during 2024, while Tripura reported only one case. Arunachal Pradesh and Chhattisgarh registered just two cases each. According to NCRB, the national crime rate for environment-related offences stood at 4.1 cases per one lakh population in 2024. Tamil Nadu recorded the highest rate at 34.3, followed by Kerala at 25.4 and Rajasthan at 13.2.

A category-wise breakup shows that offences registered under the Cigarette and Other Tobacco Products Act constituted the majority of cases. Out of the total 57,670 offences nationwide, 46,333 cases fell under the tobacco-related law alone. Noise pollution violations formed another major chunk, with 8,639 cases recorded across India. Rajasthan alone accounted for 8,264 of these cases, emerging as the highest contributor under the category.

Forest and wildlife offences continued to remain comparatively lower in official records. The country registered 1,425 cases under the Forest Act and Forest Conservation Act, while only 497 cases were recorded under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. Uttar Pradesh reported the highest number of

forest-related offences with 896 cases, followed by Rajasthan with 133 and Himachal Pradesh with 126. Rajasthan topped wildlife-related offences with 205 cases, followed by Uttar Pradesh with 118 and West Bengal with 45 cases. Meanwhile, Haryana reported the highest number of offences under the Environment Protection Act, 1986 with 320 cases, closely followed by Maharashtra with 303. However, experts say these figures barely scratch the surface. Vivek Rathod, environmentalist and member of Visakhapatnam-based NGO Wildlife Conservation Through Research and Education (WCTRE), terms the data "100 per cent underreporting."

Echoing similar concerns, another expert who requested anonymity said NCRB data does not provide a complete picture of wildlife crime in India. "We are seeing only a small portion of India's wildlife crime reality through NCRB data. These statistics mainly reflect policing and criminal justice performance, not the actual state of wildlife conservation. Since most wildlife offences fall under the jurisdiction of forest departments, many cases never enter NCRB records," he said. In the absence of a unified database integrating police and forest department cases, the real extent of hunting, illegal trade, possession, habitat destruction and other wildlife offences remains unclear, opined an expert. While the NCRB itself cautions that states and union territories should not be compared solely based on crime figures, environmentalists call for a unified reporting mechanism.



These statistics mainly reflect policing and criminal justice performance, not the actual state of wildlife conservation. Since most wildlife offences fall under the jurisdiction of forest departments, many cases never enter NCRB records

— Experts