Comprehensivness in Forests Restoration

What is the issue?

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- ‘India State of Forest Report 2017’, which was released by Environment Ministry, shows that there have been some positives.
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- We must refine the strategy to further revive forests in totality – which requires moving away from monoculture plantations.
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What is the cause for concern?

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- The environmental policy that envisions raising forest cover to 33% of the geographical area in the long term has yielded some dividends.
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- Based on satellite imagery, ‘India State of Forest Report 2017’, and shows that 24.4% of India’s land area is under some form of forest or tree cover.
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- This means that the forest and tree cover together registered a 1% rise over the previous estimate two years ago.
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- However, these estimates are mere remote sensing data don’t really provide deep insights into the integrity of the green areas.
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- Notably, the qualitative difference between “very dense, moderately dense, and scrub forests” needs further scientific pondering.
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- Also, mere tree cover is not the same as having biodiversity, and mono-culture plantation cater more to commercial industrial needs than to nature.
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- Recreating forests akin to the previously undisturbed assemblage of plants, trees and animals, is what would constitute a comprehensive revival.
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What are the glitches in the present approach to development?

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- **Economics -** Some have come to regard the calculation of national income accounts (GDP), wealth generation and development as weak.
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- This is because the degradation of forests and the consequent loss of their natural services such as climate moderation aren’t accounted for.
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- Notably, forest degradation erodes the gains made by many communities, because lost natural capital eventually contributes to material losses.
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- Hence, developmental activities need to be environmentally sensitive.
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- **Compensating Losses -** The Ministry’s report has calculated a cumulative loss of forests in Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal of nearly 1,200 sq km.
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- The impact of such a terrible loss must be seen against the backdrop of the Northeast representing a global biodiversity hotspot.
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- Hence, remediation programmes elsewhere, like in Odisha, or Himachal cannot adequately compensate for biodiversity losses in the Northeast.
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What is the way forward?

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- India must move away from monoculture plantations that are presently favoured by even forest development corporations in many States.
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- Scientific reviews to bring true natural forests with its biodiversity intact are needed, which is more than merely increasing the number of trees.
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- Presently, more than 300,000 sq km of area is open forest with a tree canopy of 10-40%, which can be capitalised to drive the revival program.
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- Such actions, combined with a policy against open cast mining, and efforts to protect the precious Northeast forests can bring about a forest renaissance.
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Source: The Hindu

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