

The rot in the forest department



TRACKING CORRUPTION
PART 8

While forests are a key part of the country's ecosystem, they are also a source of livelihood for poor households. The State of Forest Report 2005 estimates that while 20.6% of India's geographical area is covered by forests, about 29% of the country's villages are dependent on them. Often, local people have had to pay bribes to forest officials ahead of collecting and selling forest produce such as timber and herbs. A Transparency International India-Centre for Media Studies survey estimates that one in five of the

below poverty line, or BPL, households paid bribes. It estimates that the total amount of bribes paid by these households in 2007 aggregated Rs24.08 crore.

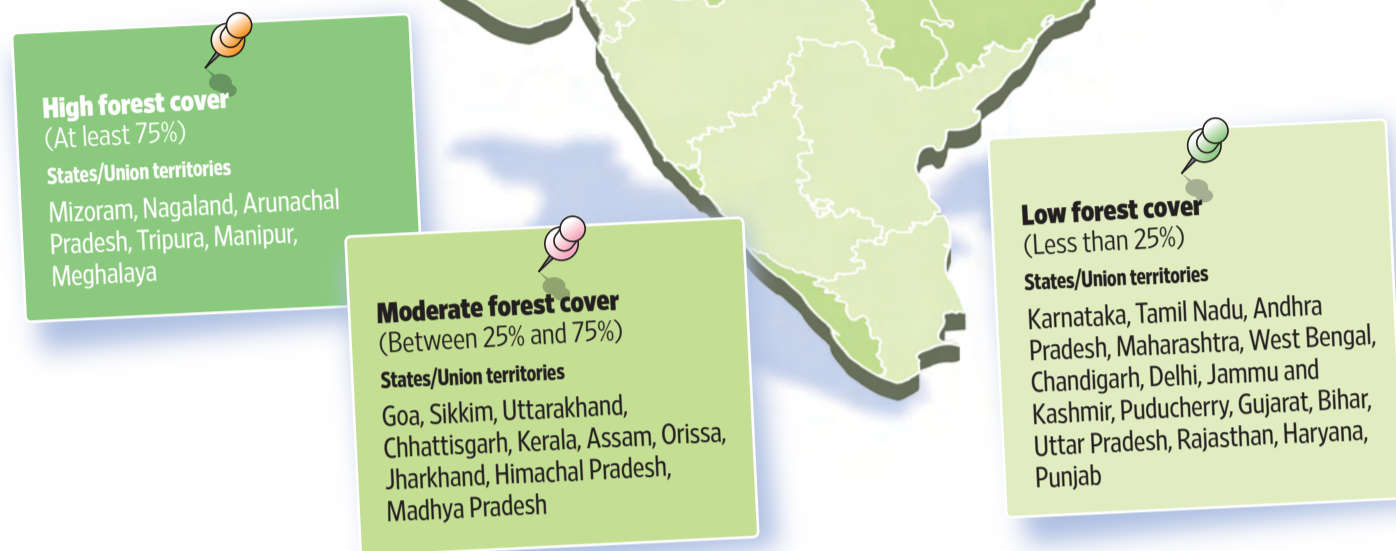
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Graphics by SANDEEP BHATNAGAR/MINT

Categorization of the states

The states have been categorized based on the forest cover and as reported in The State of Forest Report 2005. The largest contiguous forest cover in the country is in central India and covers western Orissa, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and eastern Maharashtra.

States by percentage of forest cover out of the geographical area



Point of contact (figures in %)

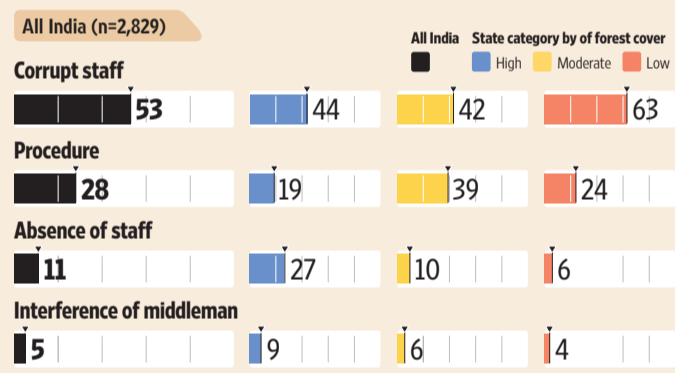
Three out of four BPL households interacted with forest department staff to get permission to collect fuel wood.

All India (n=3,303)



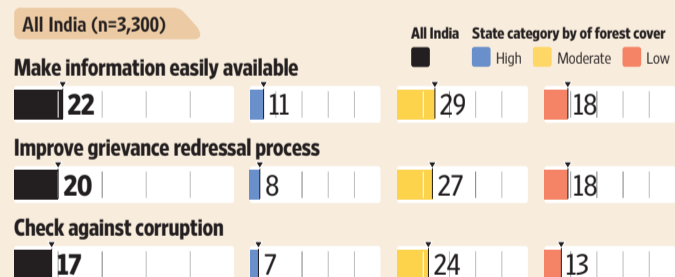
Difficulties faced (figures in %)

While at least half the BPL households maintained that forest department staff were corrupt, a little less than a third said that they also faced difficulties due to complex procedures.



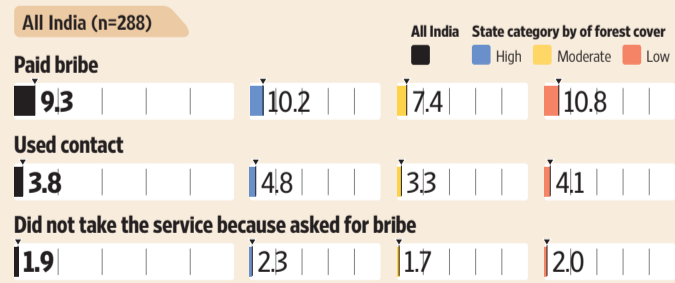
Efforts to improve services (figures in %)

An overwhelming proportion (83%) claimed that the forest department had taken no measures to contain corruption.



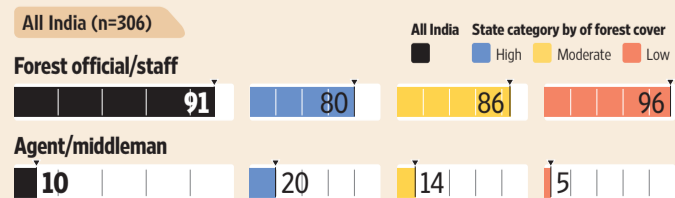
Bribe payment (figures in %)

While 36% of BPL households that interacted with the forest department perceived it as "corrupt", only 9% actually reported paying a bribe.



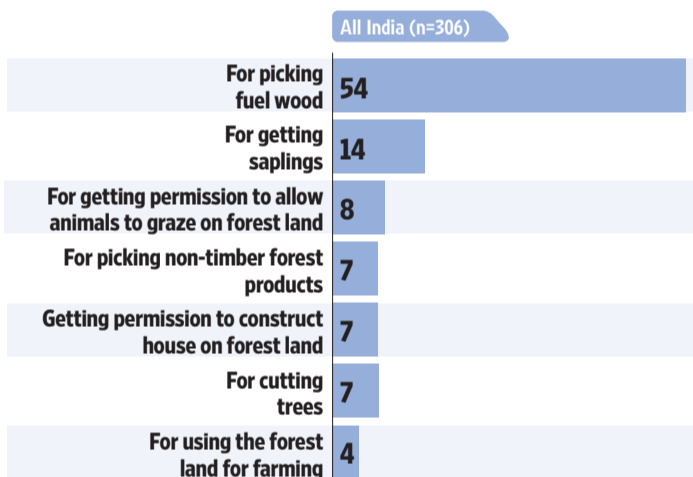
Route of bribe payment (figures in %)

Nine out of 10 BPL households paid bribes directly to forest officials.



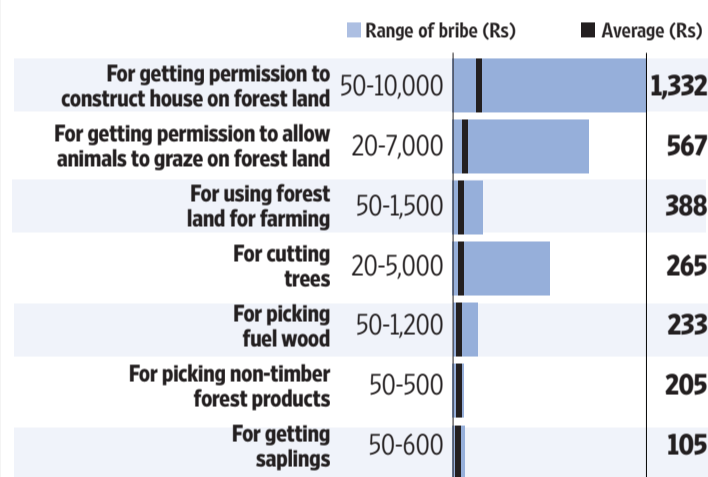
Reasons for paying bribe (%)

Of the BPL households that paid bribes or used a contact, 54% did so for collecting fuel wood from the forests.



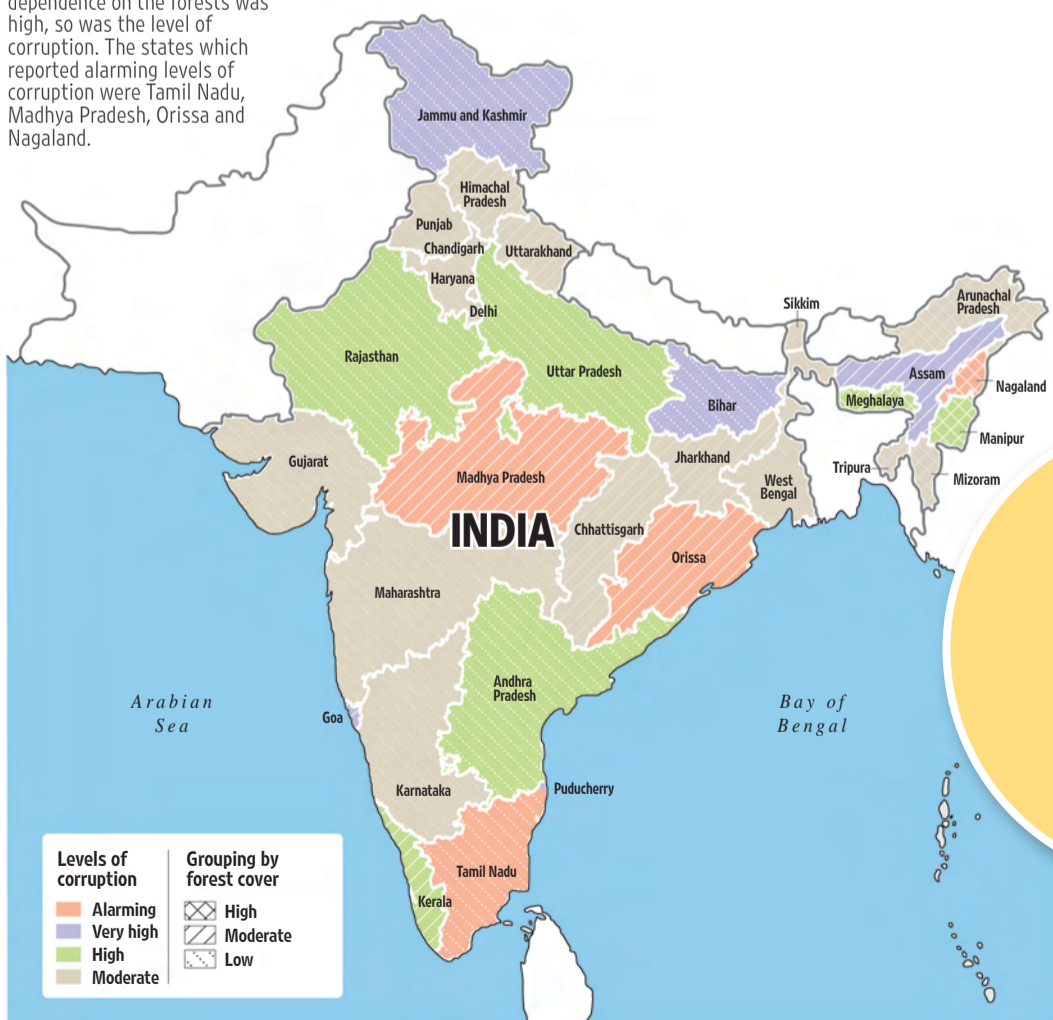
Amount of bribe paid

On an average, BPL households spent Rs164 from their earnings on bribes. The total bribes are estimated to add up to Rs24.08 crore.



How they stacked up

The survey found that wherever dependence on the forests was high, so was the level of corruption. The states which reported alarming levels of corruption were Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Nagaland.



Perception of corruption

A little over a third of the BPL households believed that the forest department was corrupt. This was particularly true of those living in Nagaland, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh and Assam. And half of them maintained that nothing had changed in the last one year.

Corruption is:



Source: Transparency International India-Centre for Media Studies survey