

possession of the forestland has been taken back by the State Forest Department. This has happened because of the shifting of the cut-off date from 25th October 1980 under the Forest Conservation Act, to 13th December 2005 under the Impugned Act which has triggered a free for all as encroachers continue to occupy and clear fresh forest lands irrespective of the fact whether they are eligible or not. Unfortunately, there is no mechanism available under the Impugned Act to evict / remove such ineligible encroachers. This is nothing less than a disaster on an unprecedented scale and open onslaught on the precious and dwindling forests of the country. The Indian Forest Act, 1927, the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 have been rendered ineffective as State Governments driven by populism and other political considerations are preventing their respective Forest Departments from taking any action to remove encroachments. Shockingly, in this exercise even the ecologically sensitive and biodiversity rich areas of National Parks and Sanctuaries which hold pristine forests are not being spared.

16. In this context it is pertinent to point out the recent killing of a Forest Range Officer of Andhra Forest Department and injuries inflicted on seven forest officials by a group of villagers in Nizamabad District who had gone to prevent encroachment on forest lands. This by no means is an isolated incident as many such incidents of assaults may have taken place all over India but gone unreported. As a result the concerned authorities have practically given up the task of