CPI(M) Polit Bureau member Brinda Karat has termed the amendments to the Indian Forest Act repressive, and said they will criminalise all aspects of tribal life.

In a letter to Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar, she said the 1927 Act had served as an instrument for the British colonialists to establish government ownership of forests and declare tribal communities encroachers, giving legal sanction to the historical injustices meted out to the tribal communities. “You have sought to play down the extremely repressive measures proposed in the Act and have entirely ignored the bulldozing of the rights of tribal communities in particular,” she said.

She said the amendments criminalised every aspect of the tribal life, giving “untrammeled powers” to the forest bureaucracy to arrest without warrant and use arms to implement the law. “The 91 clauses in the amendments now proposed, including the entirely new sections, go beyond what the British dared to do, by militarising forest conservation.”

The amendments, she said, “are a blueprint for centralization, commercialization and criminalization”. “The amendments extinguish the existing rights of tribals and other traditional forest dwellers, including those recognized in the Forest Rights Act, the Wild Life Protection Act as amended in 2006, the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, the Land Acquisition and Resettlement and Rehabilitation Act, 2013, as well as the constitutional provisions in Schedule 5 and 6.”