



Rat-Hole Mining in Meghalaya - II

Click [here](#) to know more on the issue

\n\n

What is the issue?

\n\n

The Meghalaya government must urgently ensure that all illegal mines are shut down and employment of the mining workers are diversified.

\n\n

What are the concerns with illegal mines?

\n\n

\n

- 15 miners were recently trapped inside a rat-hole coal mine in the East Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya.

\n

- The primary responsibility for the operation of illegal mines lies with the State government.

\n

- However, there has been no word on the miners by the state administration although search and rescue operations are still continuing.

\n

- This has exposed the extraordinary indifference in both central and state government to labour welfare in the state.

\n

- The National Green Tribunal has directed Meghalaya to close these illegal mines in 2014 and to levy punitive royalties on those that extracted the coal.

\n

- Despite this, illegal mines continue to operate and hence the state government should be called to account for ignoring the directions of the tribunal.

\n

\n\n

What does the committee report reveal?

\n\n

- \n
 - The Meghalaya government has been evasive on the issue of the continued operation of the illegal mines.
- \n
 - Hence a committee was appointed by the NGT headed by Justice B.P. Katoki committee to report on illegal mining in the state.
- \n
 - The committee recorded that mining activities are on and extraction of coal from the mines continue even after the ban, imposed by the NGT in 2014.
- \n
 - The committee also stated that in 11 districts of Meghalaya, 2,712 coal-laden trucks were seized since the ban was imposed, while 1,139 cases were registered.
- \n
 - Therefore, it is evident that despite the ban imposed by the NGT, transportation of illegally mined coal is going on and a large number of cases have been detected and registered.
- \n
 - Taking the report into consideration, the NGT recently asked the Meghalaya government to deposit Rs 100 crore with the CPCB for environmental restoration.
- \n

\n\n

What should be done?

\n\n

- \n
 - The Government of Meghalaya should consider closing the rat-hole mines as its first-order priority.
- \n
 - It has already avoided taking action even after a similar mine-flooding accident in 2012 in South Garo Hills.
- \n
 - Many mining workers are ready to undertake the risky labour because of the higher-than-average wages paid.
- \n
 - Thus, it is the responsibility of the Centre and the State to rehabilitate the workers from impoverished communities, reportedly including some child

labourers.

\n

- The Katoki panel reported that nearly 24,000 illegal mines are present in Meghalaya as interpreted from satellite images.
- \n
- The value of extracted coal stored in Meghalaya was officially estimated at over Rs. 3,078 crore four years ago.
- \n
- The state government has also said that a ban on coal mining is not the solution, given the economic conditions in the region.
- \n
- Yet, it has done little to implement reforms and diversify employment away from dirty mining under primitive conditions over the years, in spite of judicial orders.
- \n
- If illegal mines continue to operate in violation of rules under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, the responsibility lies with the State government.
- \n
- Recently, Parliament was informed that 22 States had constituted a task force to review illegal mining and act on it.
- \n
- Meghalaya does not figure in that list and it is inevitable for the state to constitute its own task force to reform the plight of mining workers.
- \n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n



IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering
A Shankar IAS Academy Initiative