

## **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

