

SC Order on Goa Mining

Why in news?

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Supreme Court has recently cancelled the iron ore mining leases of 88 companies in Goa.

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What led to this?

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- In Goa, the State government has displayed disregard for rules and processes while renewing licences for a second time in 2015.

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- It inexplicably chose not to exercise its right to view the licences as fresh leases that require new environmental impact assessments.

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- The government in Goa invited a cloud of suspicion by hastily launching the renewal of licences.

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- This was just a day after it unveiled a Grant of Mining Leases Policy on November 4, 2014.

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- Quite extraordinarily, it issued 31 orders on a single day, January 12, 2015.

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- This is apparently to pre-empt the Centre's Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Ordinance that came into force the same day.

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- Besides, the Union Environment Ministry's Expert Appraisal Committee raised some concerns in 2013.

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- It said many of the past leases were issued without approval of the National Board for Wildlife.

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- And miners had extracted ore in excess.

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- The requirement for clearance from the Central Ground Water Board was ignored.
- Last year, public protests over contaminated groundwater and fouled air underscored the need for strict environmental controls.

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What is the significance?

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- The mining operations are to be stopped from March this year till fresh mining leases and environmental clearances are granted.
- With SC's order, grant of fresh licences and proper accounting of the losses, mining activity in its entirety should begin on a clean slate.
- Future decisions should be guided solely by the true cost to the environment and to human health.
- The court order should help restore some balance to the exploitation of iron and manganese ore in ecologically fragile Goa.
- The order has highlighted the grievous effect of commercial mining activity in absence of clearly laid down and strictly enforced rules.
- The Supreme Court's directions provide Goa with an opportunity to change course and become a mainstream tourist State.
- It can regain its position as a top destination for global visitors and broaden employment in services.
- Tourist charters need to replace its open cast mines and dust bowls.

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What is the State government's stance?

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- Goa has argued that the mining industry is crucial to its economy as it brings in foreign exchange.

- It also provides employment and supports a transport industry.
- Given that mining has a severe destructive impact on the ecology, resumption of large-scale activity should await a scientific audit.

Source: The Hindu

