

The Battle over Mining in Chhattisgarh's Hasdeo Forest

Why in news?

The Chhattisgarh government had given a go-head for coal mining under the second phase of Parsa East-Kete Basan (PEKB) coal block.

What about the location of Hasdeo Arand forest?

- Hasdeo Arand, a sprawling forest in the northern part of Chhattisgarh is known for its biodiversity and its coal deposits.
- The forest falls under Korba, Sujapur and Sarguja districts with sizeable tribal population.
- The Hasdeo river, a tributary of Mahanadi, flows through it.
- Hasdeo Arand is the largest un-fragmented forests in Central India consisting of pristine Sal (*Shorea robusta*) and teak forests.
- It is a noted migratory corridor and has a significant presence of elephants.



What is the status of mining activity in the region?

- The Hasdeo Arand Coal Field (HACF) is spread over nearly 1,880 sq km and comprises 23 coal blocks.
- The area was declared as a 'No-Go Zone' for mining by the Centre in 2009.
- The demand for mining picked up around 2010, when the Chhattisgarh government recommended forest clearance for diverting forest land for Parsa East and Kente Basan (PEKB) coal fields.
- In June 2011, the Forest Advisory Committee of the Environment ministry recommended against diverting the forest land for mining.
- However, the then Environment minister overruled this decision, saying coal mining will be done in an area away from the dense forests.
- In 2012, Forest Clearance was granted by the MoEF for mining in phase I of PEBK coal mines.
- Though cases are pending in various courts, in March 2022 the Chhattisgarh government approved the second phase of mining in PEBK coal block.

Rajasthan is dependent on Chhattisgarh for coal supply for its electricity production units of 4,340 MW total capacity.

What are the possible consequences of mining in this region?

- According to the studies by the ICFRE and Wildlife Institute of India (WII), mining will
 - Affect the biodiversity in the region
 - Lead to habitat loss or clearing of forests
 - Aggravate the issue of human-elephant conflicts
 - Have an impact on the community in form of loss of livelihood, identity, and culture as 90% of the households are dependent on agriculture and forest produce
 - Lead to displacement of people
 - Further marginalise the adivasis
- But it backed considering mining in four blocks - Tara, Parsa, PEKB and Kente Extension with strict environmental safeguards.

What is the current issue?

- In 2021, a 300-km-long march was undertaken by around 350 people from tribal communities to Raipur alleging illegal land acquisition.
- Local women in Surajpur district of Chhattisgarh started a tree-hugging campaign as trees were being cut for the mining project in Hasdeo Aranya.
- Mining in the region is being continued as the policy for the 'No-Go Zone' was not finalised.

References

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