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Upsurge in industrial activity in Gujarat would lead to mining of ecosensitive zones: Report



By Our Representative

A recent report by two civil rights groups, Samata and Mines, Minerals and People (MM&P), has expressed serious concern over possibilities of sharp rise in mining in eco-sensitive zones of Gujarat, especially because lately construction activities are all set to see a drastic upsurge in the Petroleum, Chemical and Petrochemical Investment Region and other special investment regions of the state. The report, titled "Sharing Summary of Experiences in Mining Regions of India with Legislators, Decision Makers and Civil Society", expresses the fear that "the demand for construction materials is going to rise, which is seeing large scale illegal mining in rivers as well as undermining common property resources to set up industrial units."

Gujarat currently accounts for 1,152 mining leases as on March 2011 out of a total of 11,003 mining leases, which comes to nearly 10.47 per cent of the country. The total mining area in the state (except for fuel and atomic minerals) is spread over 30,035.65 hectares. The authors of the report, whose Gujarat part has been prepared by state civil rights activist Ashok Shrimali, believe, that the situation is particularly grim, as limestone, one of the principal mineral for cement industry required for construction, is currently totally administered at the state level.

Apart from limestone, Gujarat has large reserves of bauxite, lignite, gypsum, agate and dimensional stone and a few other minor minerals. Kutch, Amreli, Jamnagar, Junagarh and Porbandar have large number of leases of bauxite and limestone.

"The inlands from the arc extending from Gulf of Kutch to Gulf of Khambhat have milliolite limestone, which is sandstone category of rocks in South Saurashtra", the report says, adding, "A series of industries dot this arc including cement industry and soda ash, a series of deep pits can be seen along the NH along the Porbandar coast and Ambaji." It calls the Gir National Park as "one of the hotspots of dimensional stone mining, and illegal mining has been widely reported from this region along the periphery and within the park."

It regrets, the activity continues at a time when "the Centre has to still prepare and finalise guidelines for inviolate areas for mining around protected areas." There are several notifications which regulate mining in Gujarat. For Gir and the Girnar (Junagarh) area, which has tropical dry deciduous forest, mining continues in the surrounding areas, though there are clear-cut "directions" which say that "no mining shall be allowed and no major changes in landscape shall be allowed that affects hydrology and ecology of the region."

Another arid region where no mining should be permitted is Narayan Sarovar sanctuary in Kutch district, in whose neighbourhood rich in minerals like bauxite, limestone and laterite are found. As per Supreme Court directions, "no mining and crushing shall be allowed within three km radius from the outer boundary of Narayan Sarovar sanctuary."

The third eco-sensitive zone is Vansda national park, which is contiguous to the Western Ghats. The report says, according to "directions" for this zone, in the area up to five km from the boundary of the protected area no mining and crushing is allowed. Only quarrying of sand for local use in Tapi and Navsari districts in river beds is permitted in consultation with the state forest and environment department.

The report underlines, "Gujarat has been known for water scarcity and it becomes acute during the summer months, milliolite limestone acts as a permeable membrane and helps in natural protection against salinity ingress but as mining this mineral from shallower depths has increased the pace of mining and poses increased threat to available freshwater availability."

It points towards how whistle-blowers in Gujarat who have fought against illegal mining are victims of local mafia. "The instance of Amit Jetwa's murder in 2010 was resultantly due to his possessing vital information on illegal mining around Gir", it says, adding, "The Gir Youth Nature Club got a setback but is committed to challenge anything which is unlawful. The case has been transferred to the CBI for investigation."

The report says, "The activists and organisations in the region had forewarned in mid 90s about the consequences of mining in the fragile region of coastal Gujarat and the results are obvious in terms of progression of salinity

towards inland, water consumptive industries like cement extracting water from private wells through some arrangements, making agricultural production and its cooperatives risk prone.”

Meanwhile, the report says, a coalition of tribals across Gujarat and Rajasthan is conducting dialogues among civil society on rightful implementation of the laws that provide autonomy to the tribals in the tribal areas under the fifth schedule of the constitution. It is trying to “understanding impacts of mining on the social ecology of people, especially tribals. The state mineral development corporations of Gujarat and Rajasthan “major minerals under their operation like bauxite in Kutch, lignite in Junagarh and Bharuch and rock phosphate, gypsum, limestone and lignite in Rajasthan.”

The report underlines, “As they also trade in these minerals, it is particularly important and necessary that the spirit of Samta Judgment be followed as it is much valid in modern circumstances where conflicts are rising and the coinciding laws like Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (or PESA), and Forest Rights Act are kept primary to showcase constitutional duty by enabling regulations and rules to accomplish the directive principles as enshrined in the Constitution of India”.

The report gives the instance of mining in Tadkeshwar village, which is situated in Mandavi taluka of Surat district, where lignite mining project is introduced by the Gujarat Mining Development Corporation. “Dilemma to part away with land with meagre compensation as well as coping with guarded environment during public consultation (public hearing) has put the community in tremendous pressure. On top of this, mining project there is also an express highway proposed that will demand more land from the same village community”, the report says.

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Pankti Jog[April 07, 2013](#)

Very informative report. Lack of transparency is also a biggest concern. Procedures for allotment of lease for mining should be transparent and should have scope to include people's voice. As per section 4(1) b of RTI act says, details of any lease or authorization should be proactively disclosed in local language through wider media. However in Gujarat, information related to mining lease contract, accounts of paid and pending royalty, area of the lease are wrongly interpreted as "third party" and officers ask for the opinion of the lease holders. It goes without saying that in most of the cases such information is not given and applicant's life comes into threat. Despite order from Gujarat Information commission to disclose lease info on the website, Gujarat Government has not put the same. -- Pankti Jog

<http://www.counterview.net/2013/04/upsurge-in-industrial-activity-in.html>