

Tree felling for coal mines in Hasdeo forest begins in Chhattisgarh, locals, environmentalists protest

TNN | Dec 21, 2023, 10.02 PM IST



RAIPUR: Tree felling for Parsa East and Kanta Basan (PEKB) extension coal mines in Hasdeo forest region in Surguja district in Chhattisgarh began on Thursday amidst massive security cover by police, with the environment conservation associations and forest rights activists alleging that the tribal protestors and campaigners were picked up by the police to prevent them from staging demonstration.

The PEBK coal mine has been allotted to Rajasthan state power generation corporation limited by ministry of coal. The minister of environment, forest and climate change has granted the power company for extension on the mining site for excavation of coal in the last phase. From the 134.760 hectare land of forest allotted for

the coal mine, about 91.130 hectare land has to be handed over to the Rajasthan company for mining.

Hence, the forest department and Surguja district administration jointly decided to begin the exercise of tree felling for extension of the coal mine. With previous experiences of protests and heavy demonstration, the mining related process was withheld in June last year for three mining projects in Hasdeo Arand by the previous Congress government. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had also expressed his displeasure over the expansion of coal mining operations in Chhattisgarh.

In reaction to the latest development and allegations that locals were being threatened by police and administration to refrain from any kind of demonstration, farmer activist Rakesh Tikait has released a video condemning the move stating that many farmer labourers were arrested while the local tribals have been

fighting to save their jal, jungle, jameen.

“Is this the first work of tribal chief minister to act against protesting farmers and labourers? Our fight to save Hasdeo forest will continue and we will go inside forest and carry a massive protest. The governments want to favour industrialists like Adani and Ambani,” Tikait said.

Leader of opposition Charandas Mahant in the state assembly said that permission for tree felling in Hasdeo has been granted and over 30,000 trees have already been cut while 2.5 lakh more will be felled in coming days. “Is it true that the tribal people have been arrested today and permission for mining on 14 hectare forest land has been granted? The government has just formed and you haven’t yet given anything to the poor but began giving to Adani. Don’t give poor’s jal, jungle, jameen to Adani,” Mahant said.

There were reports that Alok Shukla, convener of Chhattisgarh Bachao Aandolan and other activists proceeding towards Hasdeo, were intercepted on district borders and were not allowed to enter.

Speaking to TOI, Surguja superintendent of police Sunil Sharma said, “There have been no arrests made at all. As there were protests earlier in March-April last year on the mining site and FIRs were registered against few people for arson and riots, police teams had approached the local villagers on Thursday morning and advised them not to become a reason for disturbing law and order situation. They were asked to abstain from violence that happened last time. None of them were picked. The process of extension is going on peacefully till now without occurrence of any incident.”

SP clarified that there were no outsiders being allowed so that the situation remains under control.

Representatives of Chhattisgarh Bachao Aandolan (CBA) staged protest in Bilaspur against the move of government in Hasdeo.

Alok Shukla of CBA said, “Young friends of Hasdeo Aranya Bachao Sangharsh Samiti including Ramlal Kariyam, a sarpanch of Ghatbarra village Jainandan Porte and Thakur Ram were picked by the police. We strongly condemn the action and demand for immediately put on hold the deforestation drive going on. The catchment of Hasdeo

river and Minimta Bango Dam irrigates four lakh hectares of land and wildlife institute of India had written in its report that coal mining in Hasdeo will threaten the existence of river and dam. The human-elephant conflict in the state will increase so much that it can never be controlled again.

Sanjay Parate of Chhattisgarh Kisan Sabha has strongly condemned the arrests of the agitators and villagers. He said, "Chhattisgarh assembly had unanimously passed a non-official resolution on July 24 last year that Hasdeo Aranya should be kept mining free. The entire area falls in the fifth schedule and no gram sabha has given permission for mining and coal mining is violation of the Forest Rights Act, PESA Act and Land Acquisition Act."