

## **Angul set to lose 2,417 ha forests**

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When the Government has launched 'Comprehensive Action Plan for Clean Air' under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) in Angul, ironically, it has started the process to auction eight opencast coalmines with enough potentiality for air pollution in the district.

Already, Angul has been declared as a critically polluted area. The six-city action plan, along with Angul has been designed to enable time-bound reduction in air pollution levels.

Of the six cities, industrial towns of Angul, Talcher and Rourkela have special challenge of reducing industrial emissions and mining impacts. As per the action plan of the Government, the industrial and mining towns have to reduce particulate matter of 10 micrometre in diameter or less (PM10) level by at least 39% to 45% and fine particulate matter (PM2.5) level by about 14% to 30% depending on the city from the current base line to meet the clean national ambient air quality standards. The clean air action plan is designed to arrest the trend and increase the number compliant days in worst performing cities.

According to a study, air pollution is the second largest risk factor in the State. In fact, the death rate per 1,00,000 population at 65.3 is quite similar to that of Delhi. If air quality improves, life expectancy of average citizens in Odisha can increase by about 1.2 years. But contrary to its Action Plan, out of total nine in Odisha, the Government is allowing as many as eight coal mines for commercial use in Chhendipada block of Angul district.

In Chhendipada block, already four coal mines have been allotted earlier to various companies, including Utkal D and Utkal E to Nalco, Utkal C to Gujarat Electricity Board and Naini to Singarani. As much as 1,256.74 hectares of forest will be lost for these mines, whose works have been started already.

Again after the scheduled commercial coalmine auction of eight coal mines, total 1,160.63 hectares of forest will be lost. So for the above 12 coal mines, 2,417.37 hectares forest will be lost in Chhendipada block. Moreover, large forest patches have been destroyed in this block due to already established big steel and power plants and coal mines. Angul district already has 16 coalmines of MCL and big industries like Nalco, NTPC, TSTPP, TTPS, JSPL, Monnet, Tata BSL Steel and many coal washeries.

Coal dust, fly ash and other pollutants have converted this once agrarian clean area into one of the Critically Polluted Area of the country. "Without assessing the carrying capacity of this most polluted area, operating eight more coal mines will bring disaster to the people," State Congress working president Pradeep Majhi. Majhi said, "Auctioning of coal blocks makes no sense, particularly when most of these blocks do not have environmental clearances or clarity in land ownership issues. Many are in heavily forested areas."

Environmentalist and team leader, Foundation for Ecological Security, Swapna Sarangi said, "This is the first time private players have been allowed in India to mine coal for commercial mining purposes.

The world is progressively reducing its reliance on coal for power generation and a majority of all global new electricity capacity installations are based on renewable energy. Coal-fired power plant retirements are accelerating across the world. Coal has suffered 100 per cent of demand decline evident across India. In this context, new coal mines in Angul will lead to disaster." In the mean time, people of Angul in general and Chhendipada in particular, are very much apprehensive about the private coalmines.

Already thousands of people including women are facing court trials due to false and fabricated cases slapped by private companies upon them, while they had strongly protested forcible land acquisition for establishment of mines in the Chhendipada area.

"People are no way prepared to lose their land, livelihood, common property resources and forest as mining by private players will only benefit a few rich people," said Citizen Action Forum secretary CR Sahu.

Source: <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2020/state-editions/angul-set-to-lose-2-417-ha-forests.html>