Forest Dept. opposes denotification of Kudremukh forests

By Our Staff Correspondent

MANGALORE, MAY 18. The Forest Department has expressed its opposition to the Government's move to denotify the Kudremukh national park area in the Western Ghats. This assumes significance in view of the Government coming under pressure to lease the area for mining.

The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) has been hoping to exploit the rich mineral reserves in Gangrikal and Nellibeedu.

The State Government had sought the opinion of the department on denotifying the area, which is spread over Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Chikmagalur and Shimoga districts. The World Wildlife Federation has identified the Western Ghats range that includes the Kudremukh national park among the 14 hot spots of the world for its bio-diversity.

Following strong lobbying from the mining companies, the Centre had directed the State Government to take steps to de- notify the Gangrikal and Nellibeedu areas coming under Kudremukh national park. The State Government referred the matter to the Forest Department.

Expressing its opposition, in its report, the department has said: "There are no other forest areas in Karnataka more deserving than Kudremukh to be declared as a national park."

The Chikmagalur Deputy Commissioner is reported to have sent a Rs. 5,000-crore rehabilitation plan for the dwellers of national park area. But the Forest Department has said that there was no need to shift the people living inside the national park area as their activities posed no threat to the flora and fauna.

It is said that the letters received from the State Government indicated its intention to denotify the Gangrikal and Nellibeedu reserves and also to extend the lease period to 10 years for KIOCL.

Meanwhile, the department has slapped a fine of Rs. 5 lakhs on the KIOCL for carrying out unspecified work which posed threat to forests.

The Bio-diversity Initiative Trust, headed by Prof. S.A.Hussain, who has written to Mr. Nagaraj Shetty, Additional Chief Secretary and Principal Secretary, Department of Forests and Ecology, about the work in the national park area, has said that the area was endowed with rich flora and fauna, which were not found in any other place in the southern peninsula.

Also, it was one of the hot spots identified under the Treaty of the Biodiversity Convention to which India was a signatory, he said.

The treaty stipulated the signatory country should take measures to preserve its diverse resources. This made it binding on India's part to ensure that the area was not decimated.

The trust has come out with valuable data about the rich biodiversity of the area in its book *Biodiversity of the Western Ghats Complex of Karnataka — Resource Potential and Sustainable Utilisation.*

Prof. Hussain told *The Hindu* that the trust was shocked that a letter had been sent in March from the Prime Minister's Office to the State Government advising it to freeze all procedures of formalising/legalising the declaration of Kudremukh area as a national park and renewing the existing mining licence and prepare de-notification of all the additional areas as demanded by KIOCL.

This included Gangrikal and Nellibeedu areas as well as the Bhagavati Forest block, through which the KIOCL ore pipeline passes through to reach Mangalore harbour.

The cumulative effect of the above multi-pronged actions would see the end of one of the finest and least explored biodiversity hot spots of the Western Ghats, Prof. Hussain said.

KIOCL: Devastating consequences for the Western Ghats?

By Ganesh Prabhu

KARKALA (UDUPI DT.), JULY 17. With a one-year temporary licence granted to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) that will expire on July 24, and the State Government denotifying 3,703.55 hectares of the Kudremukh National Park and clearing the way for a 20-year lease licence to the KIOCL, environmentalists, intellectuals and local people are gearing up for a struggle to stop the grant of any fresh lease licence to KIOCL.

These sections of people have always maintained that the KIOCL's mining activity has had devastating consequences on the Western Ghats, one of the 18 hotspots of bio-diversity in the world, in which the National Park falls. The denotified area of 3,703.55 hectares of prime forest land falls within the 600 sq. km. (60,032.28 hectares) area of the Kudremukh National Park. This extent of land in the Western Ghats was notified as the Kudremukh National Park in 1987. The KIOCL was originally granted a mining lease for 30 years by the State Government in 1969, which expired on July 24, 1999. It was extended twice for one year each despite opposition from people.

The national park, which falls in the districts of Udupi, Dakshina Kannada and Chikamagalur, is a tropical evergreen forest, which houses the largest wildlife reserve in the Western Ghats. It receives an annual rainfall of 7,000 mm. The shola forests or the high elevated grasslands in the park, play a vital role in checking the flow of rainfall and preventing soil erosion, with the result the percolated rain water is released into thousands of streams, which abound in this region, round the year. Three major rivers such as the Tunga, the Bhadra and the Nethravati have their origins here and provide livelihood to the people living downstream in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.



The evergreen forest of the Kudremukh National Park in the Western Ghats.

The Bhadra reservoir provides irrigation to 1,05,570 hectares in Karnataka, while 6,63,261 hectares of land in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh are irrigated by the Tungabhadra reservoir.

According to Mr. Niren Jain, Co-ordinator of the Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation, Karkala, the mining operation of the KIOCL is being conducted in the catchment area of the Bhadra Reservoir at a height of 950 metres above sea level, and the dam site is 600 metres above the sea level, resulting in the flow of silt from the mining areas to the reservoir. The silt from the Bhadra Dam overflows into the Tungabhadra reservoir contributing to its sedimentation. Farmers in the region complain that their paddy yield has come down from 16,000 kg/acre to 400 kg/acre due to the flow of silt into their fields. A recent report by the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, points out that open cast-mining leads to a direct loss of habitat for a variety of plants, and the indirect impact on bio-diversity of the region is grave. The Lakya Dam built to store the waste from the mined concentrate has submerged nearly 572 hectares of shola forests. The mining has reduced the diversity of fishes in the Bhadra, Nellibeedu and Lakya Holey areas. The national park supports the largest number of Lion- tailed Macaques, a highly endangered primate, endemic to the Western Ghats. It is also a home to another endangered species — the Deccan Masheer.

Environmentalists fear that if the lease is renewed for another 20 years, the KIOCL will be forced to build another dam at Kachigey Holey to store the iron tailings. A 100-metre high dam at Kachigey Holey will submerge another 210 hectares of wildlife habitat in the national park and create additional environmental problems.

The KIOCL is mining low-grade iron ore at Kudremukh and it can shift its operations to Sandur in Bellary district, where high-grade iron ore is available. They say that a slurry leakage such as the one which took place near Bajagoli in Karkala taluk in July last year, cannot be ruled out. The KIOCL, which employs 2,300 people, is the largest 100 per cent export-oriented unit in the country. It exports blast furnace grade and DR grade pellets to countries such as Australia, Japan, Iran and China. The company earns foreign exchange worth $ 150 million annually. An official from the KIOCL says that the environmental movement against the company is one- sided.

The National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI), Nagpur, has given a report that is favourable to the KIOCL. The report indicates there is no serious impact on environment in the Kudremukh region due to the pro-environment measures adopted by the company. The KIOCL is not contemplating mining in the Nellibeedu and Gangdikal areas, though a survey was conducted at Nellibeedu long ago.

The KIOCL had sought a 20-year lease from the Government. The utilisation of the BMQ technique may help prolong mining though the iron ore is diminishing in Kudremukh. The Lakya Dam can accommodate iron tailings for another 10 years at the present rate of production. The KIOCL has already replaced the 18 km. slurry pipeline out of the 67 km. long pipeline connecting the KIOCL to the Mangalore Port.

The rest of the pipeline will also be replaced. Rock filled dams have been constructed in two valleys to prevent iron tailings from joining the Bhadra river due to soil erosion.

Moves afoot to rehabilitate tribals

By Our Staff Correspondent

MADIKERI, JULY 17. A committee, comprising officials of the Revenue, Forest and Police departments, has been constituted for identifying land for rehabilitating the tribal people living in the Nagarahole National Park on the Kodagu side.

The meeting held here on Monday was presided over by the Deputy Commissioner, Mr. G.V.Ramachandra. It followed the decision of the State Government to rehabilitate the tribal people out of the forests and make them join the mainstream, an official press release stated here on Tuesday.

The forest official from Hunsur, Mr. Annayya, who attended the meeting, said that 943 tribal families had been living in the Nagarahole National Park on the Kodagu side. Their population was 3,720. Some of them had agreed to the proposal to move out of the forests, he said.

He said that the culture of the tribal people had to be studied and steps had to be taken to provide them facilities before they were shifted from the forests. Such a move would instill confidence in them. There were a number of programmes of the Union Government and the World Bank from which funds could be obtained for their rehabilitation, he added.

The Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Ramachandra, suggested that an action plan, similar to that adopted for rehabilitating the tribal people at Heggadadevanakote in Mysore District, was needed for their counterparts in Nagarahole. It was decided that the plan, which should be submitted to the State Government, would be prepared once the committee identified land for rehabilitating them.

'Wipe out epidemics'

By Our Correspondent

KOLAR, JULY 17. The Chief Executive Officer of the zilla panchayat, Mr. G.Ramachandra, said here on Monday said that a reason for the backwardness of Kolar was that most contagious diseases, including malaria, were prevalent in the district. He regretted that people were not well trained in hygiene.

vt. dilly-dallying on mining lease extension worries KIOCL

update 20

By Kingshuk Nag

BANGALORE: A pall of uncertainty hangs over the public sector Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL), with its mining lease getting over in July and the government showing no signs — at least for the time being — of extending it. The problem is that the company's mining area at Kudremukh is located on the western ghats — on the periphery of a national environmental park and barely 64 km (as the crow flies) from the Arabian Sea.

The Union ministry for environment and forest is agitated that open cast mining in the area is damaging the flora and fauna.

Moreover, the afforestation programme taken up by the company is not up to the mark, the ministry feels. While the project has destroyed rosewood and sandalwood trees, the afforestation programme consists of plantation of acacia. Though the company has planted 75 lakh acacia plants, they are not a substitute for the trees destroyed. "For instance, the acacias do not have the capability of withstanding winds of up to 120 km per hour seen in this area. Moreover, it is felt the rainfall in Kudremukh is being affected."

Kudremukh, which is in the Chikmagalur district of Karnataka, receives an annual rainfall of 1000 cm. The company claims that it has not replanted rosewood trees because they take 40 years to grow to full size. But the Karnataka government, which has to give the licence extension, seems to be more influenced by the Union ministry of environment and forest, and is now having second thoughts on extension of the licence. "Though the state government has not said no, even verbally, it has not indicated that the licence will be extended," said a source. Right now, the official stance of the state government is that the matter is under examination. Meanwhile, a public interest litigation has been filed in the Karnataka high court by local environmental groups. This will also determine the fate of the company.

What is worrying the company management is the fact that its order book is full and is expected to see it through for 14-15 months. Besides, an order from Japan for iron ore, to be executed over a year, is expected to be confirmed early March. "If the mines have to be closed, then we will be in soup," a company source admitted. The 30-year mining licence was granted in 1969. The company, which to start with had a buy-back arrangement with Iran, began actual operations in 1976. But it is only from 1982 onwards that operations were in full swing.

People want more open tele...

It exposed a series of violations of SC orders in Kudremukh National Park

SC protects NGO from foresters

SONU JAIN
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

A SPECIAL panel of the Supreme Court yesterday gave protection to an NGO which has been allegedly targetted by forest officials for exposing a series of violations of apex court orders in Karanataka's Kudremukh National Park.

The NGO, Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation (KWF), had been asked to explain its source of funding and its premises were raided by forest officials last week. In its complaint to the SC's Central Empowered Committee, which is supervising all forest cases, the KWF had alleged that its offices were raided because it highlighted a series of "violations" by forest officials. These ranged from illegal removal of dead and fallen bamboo to major violations like failure to notify a portion of the national park, despite an SC order.

The SC panel has now decided to set up an independent inquiry and ordered that summons against the KWF, issued by the Forest Department, will be stayed till the probe report is filed.

Incidentally, a probe had already been ordered by the Chief Minister of Karnataka.

"We have been wilfully targeted," said noted conservation biologist and KWF advisor Ullas Karanth. He stressed that the "fight" was not against the Forest Department but two senior officials — Deputy Conservator of Forests Anita Arekal and Conservator of Forests K.S. Sugura.

The NGO had questioned their decision to carve a new road through the national park's evergreen forests. And had also sought information on their overall management plan for the park under the Karnataka Right to Information Act 2000.

Denied the information, a complaint was sent to the Principal Secretary, Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms, who, in turn, recommended disciplinary action on the Conservator of Forests and his Deputy. This was when the battlelines were drawn.

A list of 78 questions was sent to the NGO, ranging from their source of funding, registration details to permission required to work within the forest. Charges were later slapped under the Wildlife Protection Act and the Karnataka Forest Rules for trespassing in the park in 2001. The DCF then issued summons to the NGO on April 19.

Three days later, the DCF raided the premises of Niren Jain, another KWF member, and seized computers, diaries and documents. Jain alleges that there were no independent witnesses during the search.

Both Arekal and Sugura were present at the two-hour hearing today. Their counsel questioned whether the committee had powers to entertain the NGO's application. Asked for his rection, Arekal said: "I have nothing to say at this point of time."

Besides Karanth, also present at the hearing were Praveen Bhargava of Wildlife First and KWF's Niren Jain and Sanjay Gubbi.

HYDERABAD, JULY 27. The Telugu Desam president, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, has called upon the cadre to take up literacy promotion, population control, health for all, environment protection and water conservation as 'social responsibility'.

These and electricity pilferage control are the listed high-points of the Mahila Janmabhoomi beginning on August 1 and also of the broad-based meeting of the Telugu Desam chaired by Mr. Naidu at NTR Bhavan here on Thursday. With the 13th phase of the interactive programme devoted to the women, Mr. Chandrababu Naidu utilised the occasion to hail the path- breaking initiatives of DWCRA women, specially in the areas of micro-credit and entrepreneurship.

agencies in terms of reach and performed much better. These groups registered over 95 per cent recovery of loans while bad debts continued to hamper the working of cooperative banks. The presence of women's banks helped minimise the unhealthy influence of the village money-lender. The DWCRA groups had also helped 29,000 illiterate women to learn basics in just three months.

About 1,000 types of low-cost tools and machines would be obtained from Taiwan to help DWCRA women better their skills and crafts. Government would also give Rs. 33 crores matching grant to enable DWCRA groups expand their network.

Mr. Naidu said 4 lakh gas connections would be given under Deepam scheme, bringing the to-

connections outside the Deepam fold. Now on, all houses for the poor would have smokeless chullas and individual latrines.

He called upon partymen to utilise Janmabhoomi platform to promote better literacy, better health and better environment. He noted that 75 per cent of kids in the 5-15 age group still remained outside the school-fold. The janmabhoomi should help spread the message - 'school is where the children belong'. 'We have done fairly well in population control, but much remains to be done to fight AIDS, gastro-enteritis and other diseases', he said.

Thanks to water conservation initiatives, the State recorded 128 lakh tonne food production this year, despite drought in 800 mandals. The food output targeted for

the season began on a right note. He also claimed that the forest cover had improved significantly, recording an additional 925 sq.km.

Mr. Chandrababu Naidu apprised the meeting about the stand on autonomy to the States, removal of curbs on exports of rice and paddy, the 'prompt and efficient' work of the police investigating the serial blasts etc.

He announced that 5 lakh houses would be taken up this year under the weaker sections housing programme with 500 units reserved for MLAs and district planning boards each.

Members of the politburo, State committee, Ministers, MPs, MLAs, elected leaders and corporation chairpersons attended the meet.

Greens unhappy with renewal of KIOCL mining lease

28/7/2000

By Our Staff Correspondent

MANGALORE, JULY 27. Environmentalists of the district have termed the decision of the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests to extend the lease granted to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) for one more year as totally lacking in vision on the part of the Government on the issues pertaining to environment.

However they heaved a sigh of relief as the order issued by the ministry restricts KIOCL's area of operation.

The order comes less than a week after one of the worst instances of pollution caused by the leakage in the slurry-pipe of the KIOCL passing through the dense forests of the Western Ghats.

Environmentalists and heads of various maths in the district had urged the Prime Minister not to renew the lease to the KIOCL and instead shift the mining operation to other areas. Sri Vishvesha Thirtha Swamiji of Paryaya Pejavar Math of Udupi and Sri Bharathi Thirtha Swamiji of Sri Sringeri Sharada Peetham were prominent among them. Both had appealed to the Prime Minister against permitting mining in Gangrikal and Nellibeedu areas. Sri Vishvesha Thirtha Swamiji in an interview with *The Hindu* wanted the interests of 2,500 workers of the KIOCL to be protected by rehabilitating them in other mining sites.

With the KIOCL ready for disinvestment, a majority of the workers have been considering opting for the Voluntary Retirement Scheme. According to the disinvestment pattern being worked out, the Government will hold 51 per cent stake, which will keep the interests of the country intact in steel exports, that is if the KIOCL can persuade the Government to allow it to operate in the newly annexed areas, including Nellibeedu and Gangrikal, over the next 20 years.

The company is also attracted to the Eastern markets such as China and Korea, which are the main exporters of steel. Both countries consider KIOCL as a more economical source to import iron ore.

The environmentalists never accepted the KIOCL. The company had its share of environmental conflicts. It however boasts of its own plans for replenishing the lost vegetation in the mining areas. It has been systematically planting trees in the mining areas and has planted over 75 million saplings since the project began, according to a report of the company.

The KIOCL has also been presented with the prestigious Abheraj Baldote environment award by the Federation of Indian Mineral Industries for its outstanding contribution to the national goal of sustainable development through environmental conservation and rational utilisation of natural resources.

Bid to shield culprits of Attappady sex case alleged

By Our Staff Reporter

PALAKKAD, JULY 27. A tribal social organisation in Attappady, NAMU has alleged that some politicians and officials are trying to suppress the sexual exploitation of girls at the Agali Government Tribal Girls Hostel, in a bid to shield the culprits.

Addressing a press conference here today, the NAMU president,

were not in employment during the time of the incident.

They said no action had been taken against those ITDP officials who failed to forward the complaint of a hostel inmate who became pregnant. The ITDP officials forwarded the complaint only after the police arrested one of the accused youth. They along with some local politicians were trying to hush up the matter by offering money to the girl and her rela-

ers' and exploitation of tribal school girls in the hostels, they say, was brought to the notice of the Assembly Committee on SC/ST Development as back as 1988. The then Collector of Palakkad, Mr. P. R. Soman, had inquired into the matter but no action had been initiated yet. When Mr. Marapandiyan was the Collector during 1996-98 action was taken against a hostel warden for ex-

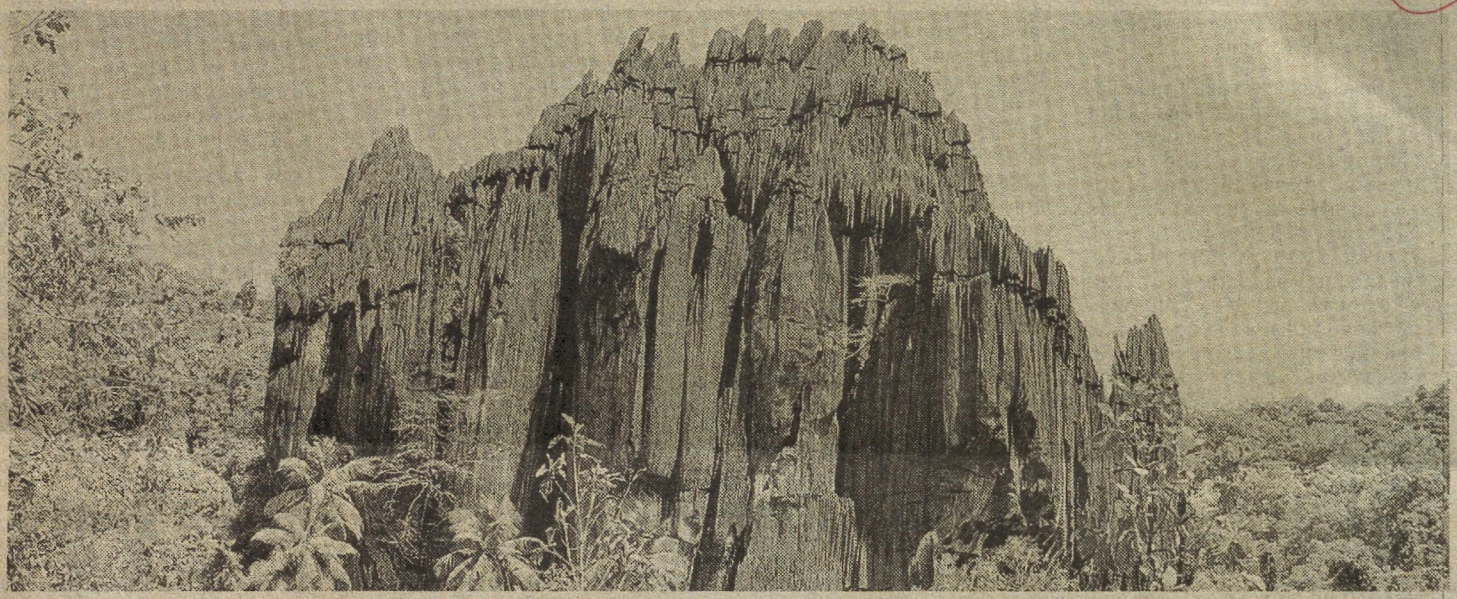
been forth coming. The survey, they said, found out 13 unwed mothers in a tribal hamlet adjacent to the ITDP office in Agali.

Meanwhile, the State organising secretary of the People's Union of Civil Liberties, Mr. Vilayodi Venugopal, in a letter to the chairman of the State Human Rights Commission demanded action against the human rights violation of the hapless tribal

H 28/7/2000

Will this wilderness survive?

See back



Yana, also known as Bhairavakshetra, is sandwiched between the Arabian Sea and the might Sahyadris. It is about 25 km from Kumta and is an important pilgrimage centre and a trekker's delight. Bhairaveswara Shikhara (in picture) is the tallest peak in the Yana region and has a Bhairaveswara shrine where an annual fair is held on Mahashivarathri. The area is rich in limestone, manganese and iron. Some industrialists have shown interest in exploiting the minerals, which could spell doom for Yana — Photo and text: K.Murali Kumar.

A South-based IT company with global links

By Our Special Correspondent

BANGALORE, JULY 27. "We are a South-based IT company with global associations which are getting constantly strengthened," Mr. Mazhar Pasha, President and Managing Director of Netripples.com has said.

During a visit to Bangalore in connection with the forthcoming public issue of the Hyderabad-based company, Mr. Pasha told THE HINDU that the strategic alliances overseas were important for the company's rapid growth. The focus of Nettipples.com was on software development in e-commerce, business-to-business (B2B) solutions, portal development, advanced training, web localisation and Internet-enabled Web applications development.

One of the overseas alliances was with Browne Global Solutions, a $ 403 million UAS company, to develop mutli-language products and services for global commerce. The New York Stock Exchange listed company had over 93 offices and development centres in 20 countries. Another partnership was with Panel Kerr Forester (PKF) of Singapore, an international firm of Certified Public Accountants and management consultants. It had 370 offices and associates in 100 countries now. Netripples.com would join hands with the company in Singapore to provide web-enabled services as a collaborative effort for the oil and shipping industries in Asia.

Another alliance was with Maya Consultancy to launch Java simulator products and services in India and share its development resources and HRD consultancy services offered to clients in the U.S. Netripples.com had also entered into an alliance with Quebec Marketing Inc., the Canadian firm engaged in developing a B2B portal for small and medium enterprises in the Quebec region.

Among Netripples.com offerings in the near future would be the Certified Web Master course in India in association with Prosoft Training of the U.S., a $ 60 million U.S. company, which offered a globally accredited certification course. The training would be centered around vendor-independent web development. A model training centre would soon be set up at Hyderabad with franchisee centres later across the country.

Another promising business area was Euro Solutions. A large number of Indian companies were already providing solutions for Euro currency conversion. With overseas trade growing, this was considered an excellent opportunity for Indian software exports. The Indian software companies would be able to penetrate the high-end and middle-level European market with cost and time saving tools to help computer systems comply with the new currrency regulations.

In human resources development and on-site consultancy, the company's programmes covered threshold technology subjects such as Internet programming, multimedia and graphics, stand- alone application development, system-level coding and ERP compatible packages.With the alliance partners in place, the company would concentrate on on-site consultancy in core competency areas of Internet skills such as Java, Coldfusion and Chillsoft and multimedia and animal requirements.

Netripples was coming out with its public issue on August 7 , of 30 lakh equity shares totalling Rs 3 crore for cash at par value of Rs 10 per share. The shares would be listed at the Bangalore, Hyderabad and Ahemdabad stock exchanges. Karvy Investor Services would be lead managers to the issue.

H 21/8/01

Anti-mining dharna fizzles out in Shimoga

By Our Special Correspondent

SHIMOGA, AUG. 20. The indefinite dharna launched by the Tungabhadra Ulisi Horata Okkoota at the Gopi Circle here on August 9 concluded on Monday because of lack of response from the elected representatives (MPs, MLAs and MLCs) of the Tungabhadra Basin.

The okkoota, therefore, decided to ask the people's representatives in Shimoga and Chikmagalur districts to specify within 15 days whether they were in favour of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) continuing to mine in the Western Ghats or if they were opposed it. The okkoota decided to stage a dharna in front of the houses of the people's representatives in Shimoga and Chikmagalur districts if they did not give their support to the movement against mining.

Addressing a press conference here on Monday, the President of the okkoota, Mr. Kalkuli Vithal Hegde, said it appeared that the people's representatives were in favour of mining activities as their indifference to the dharna seemed to indicate. However, the "message" of the dharna in which representatives of over 50 organisations had participated had reached the Government.

The reknowned Kannada writer and winner of the Jnanapith Award, Dr. U.R.Ananthamurthy, who participated in the last day of the dharna, said "his opposition to mining stemmed from an inner urge."



Dr. U.R.Ananthamurthy (centre) and others staging a dharna in Shimoga on Monday as a protest against mining by Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited.

Regretting that all the modes of production had become exploitative, he emphasised that machines should not be allowed to dominate over human beings. He called for a revolution that ensured a drastic change in the relationship between production and human efforts.

Explaining the circumstances that had forced him to associate with the anti-mining campaign, Dr. Ananthamurthy said he participated in it not as an environmentalist but as a follower of Lohia's ideology (the socialist ideology of by Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia). He said mining should be stopped immediately if the people in the region were to live happily. He hoped the Government understood the sentiments of the people.

Dr. Ananthamurthy said that the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council, Mr. K.H.Srinivasa, had informed him that he would participate in the anti-mining movement. The Minister for Women and Children, Ms. Motamma, and the Chairman of the Legislative Council, Mr. B.L.Shankar, had expressed their support to the campaign.

Another writer, Dr. Murari Ballal, who also participated in the dharna, said it was not correct on the part of the management of the KIOCL to say that the closure of mining would render 2,500 workers jobless as the mining lease given to KIOCL was only for 30 years.

The members of the Pragatipara Vidyarthi Kendra (PVK) participated in the dharna.

Later, Dr. Ananthmurthy, Dr. Ballal, Mr. Hegde, and others formed a human chain at the Gopi Circle for some time as part of their protest.

H 17/9/01

KIOCL lease: Environmentalists set for showdown with Govt.

By M.Raghuram

MANGALORE, SEPT. 16. Following the Centre's approval to renew the 20-year-lease to KIOCL on Thursday, things are hotting up in Dakshina Kannada as environmentalists are re-grouping for a final showdown with the State Government on the issue of allowing mining in Kudremukh.

Propped up by the leadership of Jnanapith award- winner, Dr. U.R.Ananthamurthy, more leaders are joining the movement against mining. Prof. Nanjundaswamy, President of the Karntaka Rajya Raitha Sangh (KRRS), Prof. B.M.Kumaraswamy, economist, Mr. Shankar Khanderi, former Judge of the High Court, Mr. Lakshmish Tholpady, Vice-President of Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, Mr. Ranjan Rao Yerdoor, Convenor of the Environmental Support Group, Mr. Kalkuli Vittal Hegde, Convenor of the Save Thungabhadra Okkuta, and Dr. Murari Ballal, economist, will take part in the rally against the renewal of mining lease to the KIOCL on Tuesday in Mangalore, and on September 23 in Udupi.

The anti-mining struggle has taken new turn with the leaders focusing on agriculture along the banks of the Bhadra and the violations of various laws relating to environment and forests. The Nagarika Seva Trust of Guruvainakere, which has picked up the trail of anti-mining struggle has brought out a research publication, *Escalating Ecocide in the Kudremukh National Park*, which cites various laws allegedly violated by the KIOCL.

The publication states that The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1978, and the Karnataka Irrigation Act, 1964 have been violated by the KIOCL, according to the publication.

The anti-mining movement is also gaining momentum in the district towards protection of farmers' interests. The environmentalists argue that because of heavy siltation in the Bhadra bed, the river might change its course thereby affecting over 2.5 lakh farmers who depended on its waters for irrigating their fields. Questions are raised about the position of the Lakya Dam, which was constructed to trap the iron ore tailings from entering the river. This fact was brought to the notice of the Government by the Deputy Conservator of Forests, Kudremukh Wildlife Division, Karkala, in his letter No. C3 CR\30 on June 30, 2000. He said: "The Lakya Dam was filled to the brim in 1984, but the company went ahead illegally to raise the height of the dam in violation of the Forest (Conservation) Act. This led to submergence of 340 hectares of pristine Shola forests area outside the area leased to the company."

The official alleged that further mining would necessitate removal of the impounded tailings or further increase in the height of the dam or construction of another dam and further submergence of the forest area outside the mining site. In 1997, the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests in his letter No. A5 (B3/GFL.CR.231/92-93 dated August 17, 1997 to the Principal Secretary to the State Government had recommended prosecution of KIOCL for increasing the height of the Lakya Dam without the Centre's permission. He said this amounted to violation of the Section 2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act and attracted heavy penalty.

But with the Centre clearing 20 years lease in favour of the company, the State Government would have to put its step down and clear all pending inquiries against the KIOCL. He said the renewal of the lease by the Centre was a ploy to sell the company to a disinvestment bidder (preferably to a foreign company) and recover the cost of the existing inventory and rehabilitation of workers at the cost of environment.

The Dakshina Kannada Parisarasaktara Okkuta, which leads the agitation, has questioned the validity of the KIOCL's claim to extend the lease term when it knew that the mining operations would be closed at the end of the original lease.

The Okkuta President, Mr. Shampa Daithota, says the company should have taken enough measures to rehabilitate its workers in some other mining site or lucratively employed them in other concerns.

Mr. P.R.Yashochandra, President of the State Parisaraskta Krishikara Vedike, says the company spoke of nearly 2,500 workers losing their jobs, but along the banks of the Bhadra, about 2.5 lakh farmers were facing uncertain future because of changes in the course of the river or premature drying up of the river.

Hindu 27/1/02

MPs' visit to KNP draws flak

By Our Staff Correspondent

TUMKUR, JAN. 26. Environmentalists have taken strong exception to the "organised visit of eight members of Parliament from Karnataka to the controversial iron ore mining area in Kudremukh National Park (KNP) on January 7."

Niren Jain of Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation, Karkala, D.V.Girish of Nature Conservation Guild, Chikmagalur, and Sanjay Gubbi of Green Watchers, Tumkur, told presspersons here on Friday that the MPs' visit amounted to interference in the judicial process.

They said their interim application (670/2001) on the issue was before the Supreme Court and the Chief Minister, S.M.Krishna, had taken a "balanced decision" to close mining activity in the park area in five years following which the Government had filed an affidavit in the court to that effect.

They alleged that the MPs' visit was a covert plan by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) to influence the judicial process.

Mr. Jain said the MPs should have concern for the lakhs of farmers who were dependent on the Bhadra. The 30-year mining by KIOCL had polluted the river water and the surroundings.

Mr. Jain said the heavy siltation was due to the opencast mining by KIOCL on the steep hills, which were also the catchment areas of the river where 700 mm. rainfall was recorded annually.

Mr. Girish said the KIOCL refused to alter its plans in tune with the changing policies of the State and the Centre on environment during the past decade.

The company knew that iron ore in Kudremukh was a finite resource and could get exhausted, but it did not try to develop alternative sources.

Alleging that the KIOCL was trying to use its 1,950 employees as "human bombs" to force the State Government to change its stand, Mr. Gubbi said the ore content in Kudremukh was hardly 30 per cent, while it was more than 60 per cent in Ongole (Andhra Pradesh) and Sandur (Bellary District).

Mr. Gubbi said the KIOCL could offer the voluntary retirement scheme (VRS) to its employees as it had a reserve fund of Rs. 350 crore.

Political parties can't sidestep tribal issues

By M. Raghuram

MANGALORE, APRIL 12. The major political parties cannot ignore the issues concerning tribal settlements in the Western Ghats in three Assembly constituencies in Dakshina Kannada in the run-up to the elections. The Bharatiya Janata Party, the Congress and the Janata Dal (Secular) will have to address the issues related to tribal people in the Sullia, the Puttur and the Belthangady constituencies and parts of Bantwal.

The police reports about the activities of Naxalites and the Forest Department's reported plan to evict tribal people from the Kudremukh National Park have raised concern in these settlements. The tribal people say the political parties have not safeguarded their interests.

The national park has seen many agitations led by non-governmental organisations. Although the State Budget for 2002-03 proposed the revival of village forest committees in the region, neither the Government nor the Forest Department has taken steps in this regard. The tribal people living in the park feel that the committees will give them security in earning a livelihood, particularly by collecting and selling primary forest produce.

None of the 74 committees formed in 1994 in the district is functioning. The environmentalists are bent on reviving them with or without the help of the Government. The tribal leaders feel that this is the opportune time to raise their problems with the political parties as the elections are drawing near.

The Nagarika Seva Trust, a non-governmental organisation, says policy makers and implementers, and the laws governing forest management and conservation have not considered community efforts towards forest management in the past two centuries. The laws adopted by the country after Independence reflect the colonial attitude of distrust of the masses. There has been alienation of local people from their rights and responsibilities to the reserve forests.

ISSUES

According to the trust, the British takeover of forests in the 19th Century restricted the extent of land accessible to people and left them with no right to manage the forests. While the then Government depleted the rich forests to meet industrial demands, the people ended up degrading, or encroaching upon, public lands.

According to studies conducted by the Federation of Voluntary Organisations for Rural Development, Karnataka, there has been a shift from "top-down" policies in recent years, and efforts have been made to devolve powers to the local people. But the devolution has not been as desired.

The National Forest Policy, 1988 recognised that meeting environmental concerns and rural people's needs are the most important objectives of forest management. The policy emphasised the importance of people's participation in forest conservation, protection and management. The Centre directed the State governments in July 1990 to enable people's participation in forest regeneration. In Karnataka, the initiation of joint forest planning and management in 1993 coincided with the initiation of the Western Ghats Forestry and Environment Project with British funding. A group of activists and scholars was responsible for ensuring that the concept of people's participation was incorporated into the project.

The Forest Department has come in for criticism in the 10 years of implementation of joint forest planning and management. It has not brought down forest degradation or deforestation or benefited the local communities significantly.

The environmentalists say the lack of clear and adequate rights over forest produce and lack of sufficient autonomy in day-to-day management and transparent guidelines for ecological sustainability were the drawbacks of the programme. The political parties will have to address these issues.

Bangalore

		April	Rise	Set
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H 25/7/01

Govt. decision on KIOCL a big let-down: Ananthamurthy

By Pramod Mellegatti

SHIMOGA JULY 24. "The Chief Minister, Mr. S.M.Krishna, has lost an opportunity to protect the environment."

This is how the noted Kannada writer and Jnanpith award winner, Dr. U.R.Ananthamurthy, has reacted to the reported extension of the mining activities of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) in the Western Ghat region for the next three months from Wednesday.

Dr. Ananthamurthy, who has been spearheading the anti- mining campaign, was talking to *The Hindu* when he came here to participate in the "bandh" programme, scheduled for Tuesday, organised by the "Tunga Bhadra Moola Ulisi Horata Okkoota".

He said by extending the lease for mining Mr. Krishna had abdicated democratic responsibility. He recalled how the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, showed a rare courage in opposing the proposed dam construction in the Silent Valley despite the fact that there was a pressure for it from her party members.

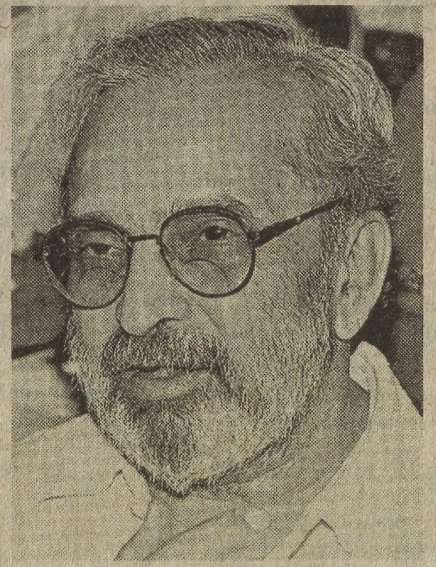
Dr. Ananthamurthy said he was personally disappointed that the Chief Minister did not rise to the occasion by putting an end to the mining activities. "I expected that Mr. Krishna, being a sensitive person, would have grasped the seriousness of the situation and acted accordingly," he said.

Asked what was Mr. Krishna's reaction when he met him in Bangalore to persuade him not to renew the mining licence, Mr. Ananthamurthy said he had gathered the impression that Mr. Krishna was almost convinced that it was dangerous to continue mining activities. "Now it appears that with good people good things may not happen always," he said.

Dr. Ananthamurthy said it was a foolish thing to say that the mining activities would be continued for three months. "Whatever studies conducted on the viability of the mining activities have supported our stand," he added.

He, however, said: "We need not despair as we have not lost hopes. As the extension of the lease period is only for three months, we can convince the Chief Minister."

He claimed that the anti-mining agitation had achieved success as the extension of the lease for mining was only for three months.



"We should never allow it to happen," was his reply when asked as to what would be the next course of action if the Government chose to extend the lease period further.

Asked how he proposed to sustain the movement after the "bandh" was over, Dr. Ananthamurthy said it could be achieved by strengthening the people's movement to keep the issue alive.

He said he had a feeling that the movement could really be stronger if the householders and housewives actively involved in it. "Besides, the movement should ensure the participation of children as it is going to be their problem," he said.

"I am worried about the animals in the forest whose existence is threatened on account of the destruction of forest," he said adding that the Jains perhaps might have to do something in the matter as for them even the "sankalpa himse" (thinking of cruelty) was strictly forbidden.

India, which had a profound philosophical base, should be able to overcome the problem arising out of the export of iron ore to Japan from Kudremukh, which had deeper undercurrents.

Dr. Ananthamurthy said he was surprised by the voluntary participation of auto-drivers in the "bandh" sacrificing their day's earnings in the larger interest of society. He said it was erroneous to classify the interests as being local or of a town or of a nation. He observed that the nation could not hold together if its interests were separated from those of a town.

Referring to the efforts being made by some quarters that the closure of the mining would affect the interests of the industrial workers, he said it was wrong on the part of the Government to adopt such a "divide and rule" policy.

To a question whether Mr. Krishna took the decision to extend the lease period under pressure, Dr. Ananthamurthy said if he had yielded to people's pressure it would have been understandable.

He said he did not approve of the State Government taking any decision just to please the Centre and added that in a federal structure the decisions of the State and the Union governments need not be the same.

Ridiculing the complaint that the closure of the mining operations would throw the workers out of employment, he pointed out that most workers in the KIOCL were on the verge of retirement as they were working with it since its inception. "In fact, a fresh labour problem will be created by extending the lease as the company will have to absorb new workers," he said.

'Scientific parameters should guide decision on KIOCL'

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, JULY 24. The decision on the future of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL), should be based on scientific and technological parameters, not on moral grounds or aesthetic feelings, the Minister of State for Information, Prof. B.K. Chandrasekhar, said here today.

He was presiding over the International Interdisciplinary Conference on Society, Politics, the Economy and the Environment, organised by the University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS) and Texas A&M University, U.S.

Prof. Chandrasekhar said the ongoing controversy over the fate of KIOCL, whose ore is much sought after in Japan, was "remarkable" in that the debate was centred around aesthetic issues, with very few technical experts offering their valuable knowhow on conserving natural resources.

The minister said the perceived threat to the agriculture sector from World Trade Organisation conditionalities was being "oversimplified", and popular debate was still being conducted on largely unfamiliar ground. "The real problem is that we are yet to discuss WTO alongside the features of our domestic policy," he said, adding that agro-economists agreed that debate on the weak points in domestic policies continued to be discussed in closed fora.

Referring to the scope of the conference which began today, Prof. Chandrasekhar said it seemed to cover every subject of vital importance to developing and poor countries which were aplenty in Asia.

"Jingoism, parochialism of the kind just witnessed in the most hyperbolic proportions before the Agra Summit a fortnight back" are an indication that the political psyche of these nations is yet to evolve, he said.

Many societies in Asia and other regions failed to monitor the political dynamics in their systems and, hence, were unable to rectify or replace failed mechanisms with efficacious ones.

"In spite of the fact that India has a fiercely independent Election Commission, for instance, although the country has largely free and fair elections each time it goes to polls, it has been difficult to usher in path-breaking reforms such as public funding (of elections)," he said.

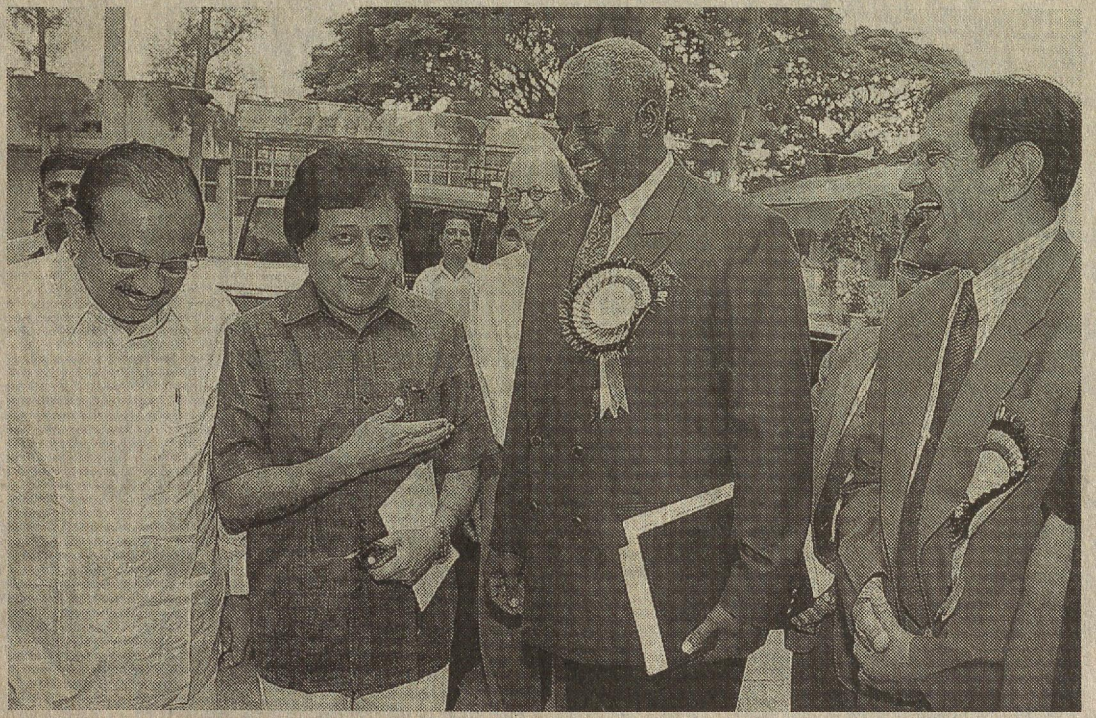
The Congress Party, to which he belongs, had recently become the first political party to talk about a public fund of Rs. 50 crores for elections, he said, and felt it was time all political parties made their stance on the issue clear.

Meanwhile, Karnataka had become the first State to bring in legislation, one relating to transparency and the other on the procedure to submit tender, for procurement of goods and services. All departmental decisions could now be accessed by the public for a fee, and even Cabinet decisions would come with an explanation justifying them.

Under the new procedure for submission of tender for works and services, for which the limit had been raised to Rs. 5 lakhs from Rs. 2 lakhs, any decision could henceforth be questioned in a court of law.

The team from Texas A&M is led by Dr. Mitchell Rice. The two-day conference will discuss esoteric subjects even while trying to accomplish short-term goals such as bringing together scholars from both sides for inter-disciplinary research and professorial associations.

The project is an initiative of the India Initiative on Education and Research set up by Dr. Arekere M. Dhananjaya, an alumnus of the UAS, who is currently doing research at the Race and Ethnic Studies Institute, Texas A&M.



The Agriculture Minister, Mr. T.B. Jayachandra (left), and the Minister of State for Information, Prof. B.K. Chandrashekar (second from left), sharing a lighter moment with Dr. Mitchell F. Rice, Director, Race and Ethnic Studies Institute, Texas A&M University, and Dr. A.M. Krishnappa, Vice-Chancellor, UAS Bangalore (right), at the inauguration of the International Interdisciplinary Conference on Society, Politics, the Economy and the Environment in Bangalore on Tuesday.

— Photo: K. Gopinathan.

H 3/8/01

KNP to be featured in 'National Geographic'

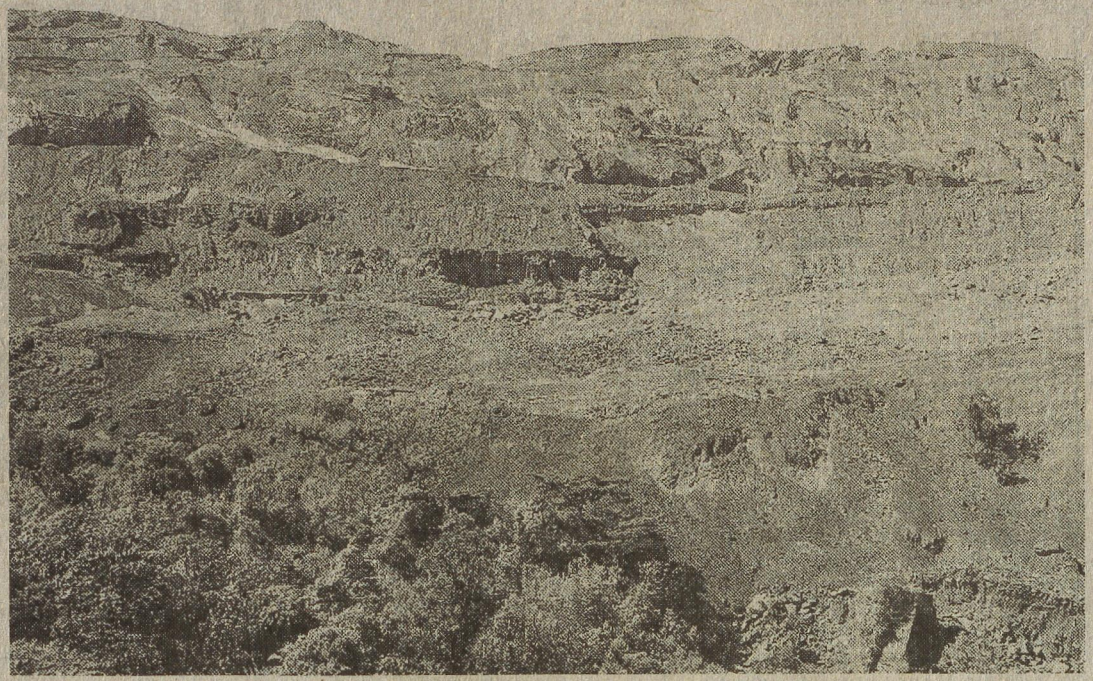
By Alladi Jayasri

BANGALORE, AUG. 2. The Kudremukh National Park (KNP) will soon feature between the covers of the prestigious *National Geographic* Magazine, which will publish a series on the 18 bio-diversity hotspots in the world in 2002.

Kudremukh nestles in the southern vales of the Western Ghats, the sliver of hills that stretch from Gujarat to Kerala, whose tropical wet evergreen forests and rich fauna have made them one of the 18 hotspots.

"Kudremukh proved to be the a good spot from where the impact of development on bio-diversity could be assessed," the wildlife biologist, Dr. K.Ullas Karanth, who provided inputs to the team from *National Geographic*, and who was being interviewed for the article, told *The Hindu*.

Within the Western Ghats, Kudremukh is the largest chunk of protected rainforests, also home to the endangered lion- tailed macaque, apart from the Malabar civet and the king cobra. It is also a well-known habitat for tigers. The KNP also offers prospects for long-term conservation initiatives for a sizeable "chunk" of biodiversity. Being a major watershed area with its network of sholas, its hydrological function of sustaining agriculture and related activity is invaluable, according to Dr. Karanth.



Remnants of the Shola forests after mining in the Kudremukh National Park.

The feature, in the *National Geographic* will view the Western Ghats from several vantage points to ascertain the impact of development and resources-exploitation on the bio-diversity, and it will therefore, look at the how the mining activity of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) has impacted on the bio-diversity. Nagarahole's problem of resettling the tribal people, and Bhadra, where human settlements within the national park present another facet of the negative impact on bio-diversity, will also figure in the article. For Dr.Karanth, the Kudremukh story comes a full circle from the time in early 1980s when he undertook the first ever scientific survey of what is today the national park. In 1975, he found the Malabar civet, which was thought to have vanished from the region. A few years later, primatologists came to the conclusion that the lion-tailed macaque was confined to Kerala and the scattered hilly areas of Tamil Nadu.

Dr. Karanth undertook a status survey of the species (he estimated at least 3,000 monkeys in 200 groups) for the Karnataka Government, and his report to the Forest Department became the basis for a management plan for the concentration of the macaque and its habitats.

His study had taken note of the impact of a slew of hydro-electric projects in the Karnataka region of the Western Ghats, like the Sharavati, Chakra-Savehaklu, Varahi, and Yelanir ghat projects, a little further away.

It also mentions the Hassan-Mangalore railway, and road formations in the reserved forests of Tungabhadra, South Bhadra, Naravi and Kadamkal.

Dr. Karanth subsequently found himself sitting on the Karnataka State Wildlife Advisory Board, alongside Mr. M.Y.Ghorpade, who was then a legislator. He shared his report on the status of the lion-tailed macaque with the members of the board, and with an enthusiastic Mr. Ghorpade giving all encouragement, the Wildlife Advisory Board recommended to the Centre that the Kudremukh region, home to the endangered lion- tailed macaque, be designated a national park. The KNP was so notified in 1987.

19/11/01

KIOCL on the threshold of a bright future?

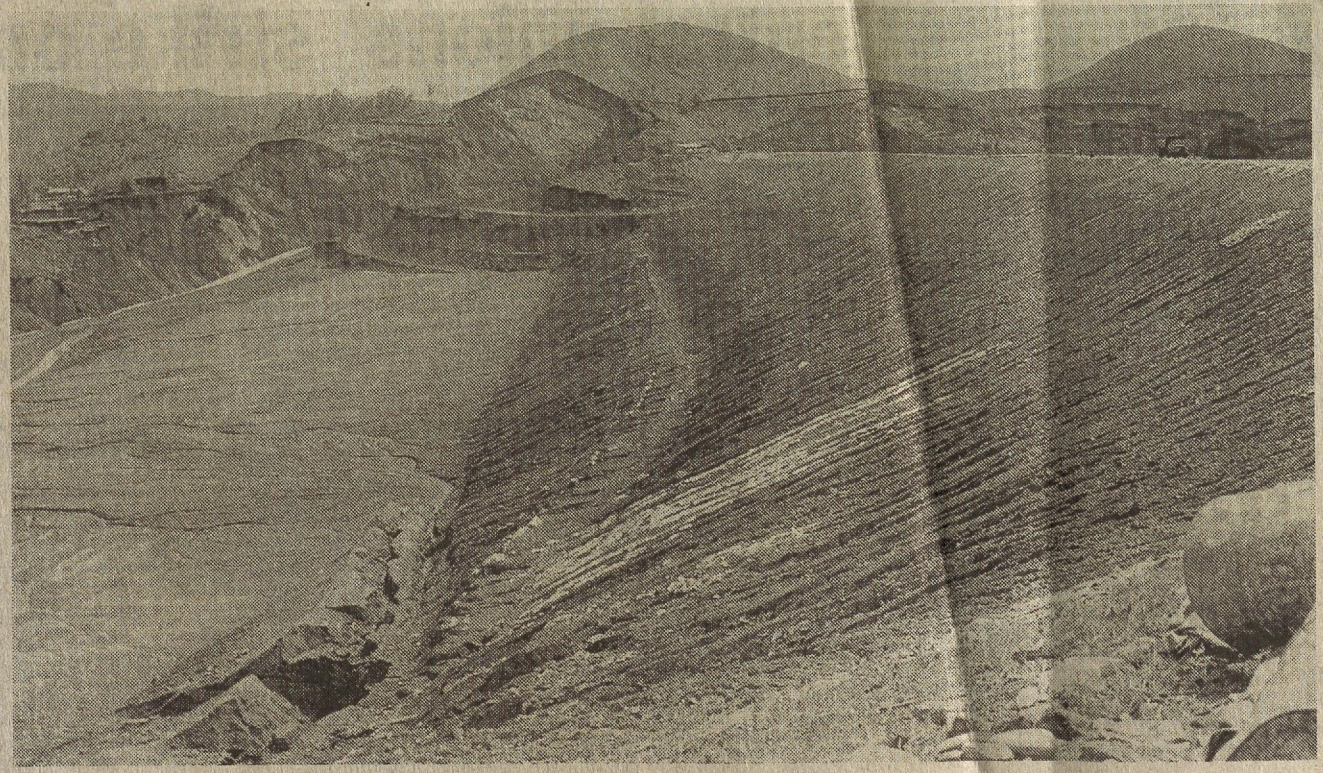
By K.N.Ramachandra

MANDYA, NOV. 18. The Kudremukh hills in the Western Ghats have 450 million tonnes of iron ore deposits. The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) is the biggest mining complex in India and produces six million tonnes of iron ore concentrate and three million tonnes of high- grade pellets from low-grade magnetic ore per year. The iron ore concentrate is highly regarded for its low alumina, sulphur, and phosphorus content and high fuel efficiency in sintering due to its exothermic properties. The mined ore is transported in slurry form through a pipeline to the company's pelletisation plant in Mangalore.

The KIOCL's iron ore concentrate and iron oxide pellets conform to international standards, and the KIOCL is a 100 per cent export-oriented unit. It exports its produce to seven countries. The company, as part of its downstream activities, started the manufacture of 1,55,000 tonnes of high grade pig iron per annum in Mangalore, using quality pellets from KIOCL's pelletisation plant which was dedicated to the nation recently. A portion of the pig iron produced is utilised for manufacturing 50,000 tonnes of ductile iron spun pipes (DISPs) annually. The company has a proposal to set up a coke oven plant at Karwar to utilise the coke produced for captive consumption.

The KIOCL authorities say that there has been a spurt in demand for iron ore pellets with rapid expansion of the iron and steel industry in countries around the world. To meet this demand the company plans to install a shaft pelletising furnace to produce 0.5 million tonnes per year, the first of its kind in Asia, in Mangalore.

The KIOCL authorities told *The Hindu* that the company had taken up a massive afforestation programme to restore the mined mountainscape to its original splendour. Two rock-filled dams were built to prevent the mine wash from polluting the Bhadra.



The Lakhya Dam containing tailings generated by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited. — Photo: T.L.Prabhakar

The 100-m. high Lakhya Dam was built to contain the tailings generated from the plant. The company has sponsored the development of the Kudremukh National Park through the Forest Department. It launched the Sanjeevini Vana to grow valuable medicinal and herbal plants including endangered species.

The KIOCL authorities say that the iron ore deposits at Kudremukh are expected to last for another 10 years. The company has applied for the mining lease for the nearby Nelibeedu deposits. As a measure of a reclamation, the company plans to recover iron ore from the tailings deposited in the Lakhya Dam, as this would be a more economical and environment-friendly alternative to increase the production of iron ore concentrate.

When the KIOCL management became aware that environmental activists were opposing the mining activities of the KIOCL in the Kudremukh National Park (under the National Park Laws) it said that a public interest litigation was pending before the apex court, and the outcome of the PIL was awaited. The authorities said that the Karnataka Government had renotified the mining area. The mining activities were being done unlike in coal mines, and no harm was caused to the environment as the company had taken steps to check pollution. The company had provided crores of rupees for the development of the Kudremukh National Park and "there is no threat to the environment." They said that environmental activists were welcome to visit Kudremukh and to verify the measures taken to check the pollution in the Bhadra, and the afforestation measures taken.

There are conflicting reports on the "mining life" left for the KIOCL. At one stage, it was stated that the mining activity would lost for five years, and this was extended to 10 years and then to 20 years.

The KIOCL is a profit-making mining unit and Government of India enterprise; the Union Environment Ministry is now in favour of giving only a five-year extension to mining while the Union Government has decided to grant a 20-year extension of lease. The Union Minister of State for Steel, Mr. B.K.Tripathi, has requested the State Government to do so.

The fate of the KIOCL now hangs in the balance. While the Union Government says that the KIOCL has an excellent track record of performance and profit in making without causing any harm to environment, environmental activists and noted writers have urged the Chief Minister Mr. S.M.Krishna, not to give licence of mining to the KIOCL as it would affect the environment in the Western Ghats. The KIOCL authorities say that mining activity is confined to 500 hectares only, and Rs. 3,500 crore is needed to set up a mining complex afresh elsewhere, if mining is closed down at Kudremukh.

Viable options

Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), a leading wildlife preservation organisation and its conservation partners have come up with a successful initiative in the Kuduremukh National Park to solve the problem of forest encroachments. SANJAY GUBBI describes the programme





Photos by Niren Jain

Above: Bhagwathi enclosure before rehabilitation; Top: Bhagwathi after rehabilitation with grasslands and sholas in the background

A recent initiative in the Kuduremukh National Park has set a trend in mitigating the problem of forest encroachments. Despite the severe degradation of forests in our state, the State Government has asked the Centre to regularise 98,000 hectares of forestland.

Neither the State nor the others who are demanding regularisation of encroachments are willing to categorise the various groups of encroachers or the area of encroachment. Their demand for regularisation should have been based on social, economic and ecological benchmarks where the underprivileged and the poor would be favoured, and the ecologically sensitive areas were saved.

It may be noted here that habitat fragmentation has been identified by scientists as the single largest threat to wildlife in India. This is a major problem for habitat specialist wildlife species like tiger, elephant, lion-tailed macaque, great hornbill and so on, which require vast stretches of undisturbed forests for their survival in terms of their dietary needs and home ranges.

These habitat specialists are not just charismatic animals but also flagship species whose conservation ensures the survival of a string of other important and lesser flora, fauna, microhabitats and organisms.

One of the most common causes of habitat fragmentation and bisection are the human settlements and agriculture in protected areas which bring in several proximate threats like human-induced fire, cattle grazing, commercial exploitation of minor forest produce (MFP), wildlife poaching and so on which are all detrimental to wildlife.

Initiative

In order to protect wildlife habitat and to set a new course in resolving this encroachment controversy Wildlife Conserv-ation Society (WCS), a leading wildlife preservation organisation and its conservation partners have come up with an initiative in Kudremukh National Park. Probably for the first time in the country a practical solution has been evolved to resolve this problem in a just and humane manner and thereby help consolidate critical wildlife habitat.

The Kudremukh National Park spread over 563 sq kms is the largest protected area comprising tropical evergreen forests with high elevation grasslands. It forms part of the Western Ghats that are identified as one of the 25 bio-diversity hot spots of the world.

This area is also designated as a priority tiger conservation block and forms a part of the priority-I Tiger Conservation Unit (TCU-55) giving the area high significance for the preservation of the tiger.

The bio-diversity in Kudremukh includes several endangered and globally significant wildlife species like the tiger, lion-tailed macaque, Malabar civet, Great pied hornbill, King Cobra, flying lizard, and possibly the Nilgiri marten, several of which are endemic to the area.

The landscape of the area is so stunning that the area is worth protecting just for its natural beauty, let alone for its wildlife. It is also a major watershed for three major rivers Bhadra, Tunga and Nethravathi.

Wildlife habitats, like Kudremukh, are fragmented by both legal private landholders and illegal occupants of forest lands.

These habitats need to be consolidated through incentive-driven, land-based, transparent voluntary rehabilitation projects. Due to shortage of funds, long-term litigation-prone government legal procedures, progress by the Government in consolidating such land enclaves have not been substantial or quick. This problem has to be solved through humane, socially just, voluntary fast track resettlement projects.

Example

A modest example of such a transparent and voluntary resettlement project is that of Bhagwathi, a critical land parcel in the heart of the Kudremukh National Park which was encroached upon since the past 20 years. This area needed to be consolidated into the protected area due to its ecologically critical location.

The idea of relocating this area was first initiated in 1998 by Ullas Karanth, Director, WCS India Programme when during one of his visits to this area he held discussions with the eight families from Bhagwathi.

The families explained their difficulties but were ready and willing to move out of the national park if a suitable compensation package was offered.

These eight families in Bhagwathi, prior to voluntary resettlement practiced dairy farming and together owned over 500 cattle which freely and illegally grazed in the national park.

They survived on supplying their produce to the nearby Kuduremukh mining township and would have been left with no means of livelihood once the mining township closed in December 2005. Besides, they had no land to cultivate in the forests.

Compensation package

On their explicit willingness to move out of the national park, WCS financially supported them with donations from Vikram Nagaraj, member of Wildlife First-a leading conservation organisation of Karnataka-who motivated his employers Microsoft Corporation, USA, to chip in a matching grant to support this novel project. A compensation package of nearly Rs 14 lakh was put together for their houses and a rehabilitation grant to buy new agricultural land outside the national park.

The significant contribution of some people who played a crucial catalytic role in this endeavor needs to be mentioned. WCS conservation partner Niren Jain of Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation, motivated and helped the families find suitable alternative agricultural land outside the park.

K N Murthy, Deputy C[illegible] Forests of the Karkala Wildlife Division, who took keen interest in this project, helped them by way of transportation and support for settlement in their new area. All the families shifted out of Kudremukh National Park on March 4, 2003 and received the rehabilitation cheques from WCS India Program Director K Ullas Karanth and President of Wildlife First K M Chinnappa in the presence of forest department representatives and conservation partners of WCS.

This project has set a new desirable trend in mitigating human-wildlife conflict through private-public partnership with international donor support and can be used as a model to solve encroachment problems in other protected areas.

Now the surrendered land is once again in the custody of the forest department. The day is not far when wildlife will return to this area and there will be less chances of them contracting foot and mouth or anthrax diseases which is passed on by domestic cattle.

Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation has also proposed to the Karnataka Forest Department to secure Tolali another key land parcel just below the foothills of the Kudremukh peak. This enclave which is popularly known as Lobo's house by most trekkers, housed four families until it was bought by a businessman from Mumbai to build a resort.

All the families from here moved out to Samse as it was too arduous to live in this hilly terrain without any basic facilities. This project has already been approved by the Government and the land transfer should take place soon.

Mr S K Chakraborthi, Chief Wildlife Warden of the forest department has taken interest in this novel initiative that will be completely funded by the Government. This move will consolidate around 150 sq kms of prime wildlife habitat without any human habitation.

Beneficial

After the Bhagawathi initiative, 21 families have formally applied to the forest department requesting a similar resettlement package.

And there are bigger groups who are keen to move out from the national park if an attractive resettlement package is offered by the government. It is evident that if a suitable humane resettlement package is offered, people would voluntarily move out of the nation[illegible] to b[illegible] th[illegible]

DECCAN HERALD 11.04.2003

Extension of mining lease to KIOCL opposed

By Our Correspondent

TUMKUR, JUNE 17. Green Watchers, an international organisation engaged in preservation of forests, wildlife and environment, has alleged that the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in Delhi has pressured the officials concerned to renew the mining lease for the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) to extract iron ore from the Western Ghats, particularly in the national park there. In a press statement issued here on Friday, Mr. Sanjay Gubbi, spokesperson of the organisation, said the KIOCL held the lease till July 25, 1999. It was extended by a year on a temporary basis. The KIOCL was trying to get it renewed for a period of five years, and it was reliably learnt that the PMO was exerting pressure on officials to do so.

He said the organisation had written to the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B.Vajpayee, and urged him to dissuade his office from doing so as the grant of lease and its renewal was opposed by environmental organisations. The KIOCL was harping on the issue of earning foreign exchange for the country and this was only a myth.

Centre's move on KIOCL lease angers NGOs

24/7/2000

By Our Staff Correspondent

TUMKUR, JULY 23. Several environmental groups in Tumkur District have decried the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and the Union Steel Minister, Mr. B.K.Tripathy, for "pressuring the State Government to renew the mining lease for Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) in the Kudremukh National Park area."

The suggestion of the PMO and the Steel Ministry to the State Government to denotify the areas held by KIOCL has evoked strong reaction from the environmentalists here, particularly Nisarga, Wildlife Aware Nature Club and Greenwatchers.

Mr. N.K.Singh, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, wrote to the Chief Secretary of Karnataka on March 31 advising him to renew the mining lease of the KIOCL for 20 years. Mr. Tripathy is reported to have discussed the issue with the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M.Krishna, recently to expedite the matter as the lease expires on Monday.

The problem was compounded because of the scant regard shown to these groups by the KIOCL, during their visit to the Nuralu Hills in Karkala taluk where the iron ore slurry was leaking. Notwithstanding these protests, the KIOCL appears confident of getting the lease renewed.

The environmental groups have suggested that the KIOCL should shift its operations from Kudremukh to Sandur. It is said that the iron ore at Sandur had 60 per cent iron content while it was 38 per cent in Kudremukh.

The groups received a shot in the arm when the swamijis of Sringeri Math and Sri Pejawar Math appealed to the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B.Vajpayee, urging him not to renew the lease of the KIOCL.

Mr. D.R.Prasannakumar of Nisarga said the Government notified the area around Kudremukh as a National Park. The PMO's contention was that the final notification was yet to be issued. This had helped the KIOCL escape from action under the Wildlife Protection Act.

Although the environmentalists have expressed hope about the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M.Krishna, deciding to study the issue threadbare, they have put pressure on the Chief Minister to go by the advice of the Forest Department.

Leak in KIOCL pipeline worsens

By M. Raghuram

MANGALORE, JULY 19. The iron ore slurry, leaking from the KIOCL pipeline passing through the dense forests of the Western Ghats, reported yesterday, has worsened and is flowing into the Yennehole river which passes through 23 villages.

In one of the worst ecological disasters, the iron ore slurry has turned the otherwise crystal-clear river into a deep brownish-grey.

The leak, reported on Tuesday, continued unabated throughout the night as engineers from the KIOCL failed to contain the leak. When this correspondent reached the leakage point, the slurry was gushing out from a 2-ft wide hole in the pipeline.

The local people, who were alarmed at the change of the colour of the river, came to know of the leakage and prevented the water from entering their fields. But the greater danger is the threat to wildlife and domestic animals all along the river's course. The river runs thorough the Kudremukh National Park and, according to Government stipulations, destruction of the ecology and water sources inside the national park is punishable by law.

Considering that the Worldwide Fund for Nature has recognised the Western Ghats as one of 18 ecological hot spots for protection of bio-diversity, this ecological disaster has been viewed by the experts as a grave danger to wildlife and agriculture.

The KIOCL which has been trying to get its mining lease extended by the State Government, appears to have bungled badly in this case.

Vimochana Ranga to stage demonstration

24/7/2000

By Our Staff Correspondent

SHIMOGA, JULY 23. The Karnataka Vimochana Ranga will hold a demonstration in Bangalore on Monday when the mining licence of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL), expires.

The State Vice-President of the Karnataka Vimochana Ranga, Mr. S.Sundara, in a press release here said that volunteers from various progressive organisations from Shimoga, Davanagere, Hospet, Chikmagalur and Raichur would participate in the demonstration. The Government would be urged not to renew the licence of the KIOCL, he said.

Mr. Sundara said it was ironical that the Union Government had chosen the KIOCL for the "National Environment Award" despite the fact that the Department of Forest had served a notice and levied a fine of Rs. 5 lakhs to it for damaging the forest area.

He said the Ranga had been protesting against the mining activities in Nellibeedu and Gangadikallu.

Centre urged not to renew KIOCL's licence for mining in Western Ghats

By Our Staff Correspondent

SHIMOGA JAN. 30. The General Secretary of the BJP Yuva Morcha State unit, Mr. C.T. Ravi, has urged the Centre not to renew the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company's licence for mining in the Western Ghats region in view of the growing apprehensions that it might cause earthquakes.

He told presspersons here on Tuesday that a series of earthquakes in 1998, with intensity ranging from 1.7 to 2.5 on the Richter Scale, in the Western Ghats region, had been attributed to the continuous mining by KIOCL over the past several years.

Mr. Ravi said that the BJP Yuva Morcha had been making sustained efforts to mobilise public opinion against the reported move to renew the KIOCL's mining licence for 20 years. If mining was allowed, it would sound the death knell of the Kudremukh forest range.

The fact that the 2,500 KIOCL employees would lose their jobs if the mining licence was not renewed should not be the main consideration. The employees could be accommodated elsewhere in case KIOCL was closed down. The environmental impact of continued mining alone should influence the decision on renewing the licence, he said.

In reply to a question, he said that the BJP Yuva Morcha would not mind joining hands with other environmental organisations which had already launched a joint movement against the renewal of the licence in an attempt to save the Tunga and the Bhadra which faced a severe pollution threat from mining in the region.

Criticising the State Government for approving the power tariff increase, Mr. Ravi said it was not fair to burden consumers without taking measures to check power theft and transmission and distribution losses. He suggested that the State Government reintroduce the earlier system of tahsildars issuing succession certificates in property matters as the new system of obtaining the certificates through courts proved to be costly and time consuming. The Government, which boasted of having introduced transparency in administration, should not do anything which was detrimental to public interest.

Mr. Ravi said it had been decided to form "Kamal Clubs" in all the districts to train the youth in sports and cultural activities.

A two-day training programme for BJP Yuva Morcha members would be held at Mudhol in Bagalkot District on February 16, 17 and 18. Yuva Morcha members would launch a drive in North and South Karnataka to collect contributions to help the victims of the earthquake in Gujarat, he added.

Plea against mining in Western Ghats

By Our Staff Correspondent

TUMKUR, JULY 19. The Tumkur unit of Green Watchers, a global environment group, has reiterated its opposition to renewal of mining lease to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) in the National Park areas in the Western Ghats.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B.Vajpayee, copies of which were sent to Mr. T.R.Balu, Union Minister for Environment and Forests, and Mr. K.H.Ranganath, Minister for Forests, and also released to the press, the chief of the unit, Mr. Sanjay Gubbi, said it was unfortunate that the Prime Minister's Office was "pressurising the State Government" to renew the lease for 20 years. He appealed to the Prime Minister to dissuade his officials from doing so, and recalled that the Pontiff of Pejawar Math, Sri Visweswara Theertha Padangal, had made an appeal to Mr. Vajpayee.

Expressing happiness at the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M.Krishna's efforts to examine the issue before taking a decision, he said the KIOCL had failed to obtain an Environment Impact Assessment report on the effect of mining on flora and fauna in the Ghats, from an independent agency.

PAV 50

Hindu 13/5/01

BRIEFLY

KIOCL gets export award

MANGALORE, MAY 12. The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company (KIOCL) has been presented the Best Exporter of Iron Ore Award for 1999-2000 by the Kanara Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The award was given away at a function, held at the chamber building by the Union Minister of State for Textiles, Mr. V.Dhananjaya Kumar, on Friday. Dr. D.Veerendra Heggade, Dharmadhikari of Sri Kshetra Dharmasthala, and Mr. Yogish Bhat, MLA, were present.

Mysterious

Action plan to protect Western Ghats

Hindu 21/5/2001

By Our Correspondent

KARWAR, MAY 20. Dr. M.D.Subashchandran, Co-ordinator, National Biodiversity Strategy Action Plan (NBSAP) for Uttara Kannada District, has said that the Western Ghats is facing threat due to the exploitation of its rich biodiversity in the name of development.

Speaking at a meeting of environmentalists, forest officials, academics, elected representatives, members of non- governmental organisations, farmers and members of tribal communities at Yellapur, he said unless an action plan was formulated, it would be difficult to protect and preserve the fragile eco-system of the Western Ghats.

He said Uttara Kannada was the only district in the State selected for the implementation of NBSAP. He called upon the people to participate in the implementation of the action plan.

The fact that thousands of people depended on the forests for their livelihood was being ignored while implementing development projects in the region, he said.

Members of the non-governmental organisations criticised awarding of contracts to collect minor forest produce from the Western Ghats. The contractors were following destructive methods to collect minor forest produce, particularly firewood. A scientific method should be adopted for the purpose, and workers employed in collecting minor forest produce should be given proper training, they said.

Farmers and tribal people said that they were being blamed for the destruction of the forests. They had the right to collect minor forest produce such as leaves and firewood, they asserted.

Mr. Ananth Hegde Ashisar, Co-ordinator of Vrukshalaksha Andolan, said steps should be taken to prevent fishing in the rivers in the Western Ghats using explosives and other unscientific methods.

Mr. Shivanand Moorthy, Deputy Conservator of Forests, called for the formation of village committees to protect the forests.

Stir against KIOCL gets a boost

MOODABIDRI, JULY 24. The "Save Tunga Bhadra" call has received a boost with the various village forest committees in Dakshina Kannada District coming out against the renewal of the mining lease to the KIOCL.

Mr. N.Vijayakumar of the Nooralbettu Village Forest Committee at Hosmar, near here, said that the Western Ghats, that includes the Kudremukh range, was a treasure house of biodiversity with the presence of some of the rare species of animals and plant life. The area also had a rare entomological profile which had been acknowledged by experts, and destruction of these sites would wipe out the species from the face of the earth, he said. Mr. Isubu Beary of the Indabettu Village Forest Committee in Belthangady taluk, said the region was the place where the Tunga, Bhadra and Nethravati originated.

Mr. Beary said the three rivers irrigated lakhs of hectares of land and any impediment caused to their course due to the mining activities would be disastrous.

Mr. Ramachandra Gowda of the Neralu Village Forest Committee in Puttur taluk said the Government should come out with a proper policy on the mining in the Western Ghats as it had been identified as one of the 18 hotspots for biodiversity conservation in the world.

Plea against mining by KIOCL

25/7/01

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, JULY 24. Four BJP members in the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday demanded that the Government not renew the mining licence granted to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) in Chikmagalur District, as the company's operations were destroying the environment.

The issue was raised during Zero Hour. Mr. Araga Jnanendra and Mr. Visvesvara Hegde Kageri said that the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M. Krishna, had given positive signals on renewing the licence, and wanted him to announce the Government's decision.

Mr. Krishna directed the Minister of State for Mines and Geology, Mr. V. Muniyappa, to speak on the matter. Mr. Muniyappa said that since the matter was sub judice, he would not comment till the court gave its judgment.

But, the minister said that the KIOCL had submitted applications for licence to take up mining in Gangadikal and Nallibeedu in the district, but they were rejected.

That statement angered the BJP members, and Mr. Kageri said Mr. Muniyappa was not giving proper information to the House. Mr. Kageri, Mr. Jnanendra, Mr. Prabhakara Bangera and Mr. Yogish Bhat walked out of the House.

KIOCL Officers' Assn. flays tirade by environmentalists

By Our Staff Correspondent

MANGALORE, AUG. 3. The Officer's Association of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) today alleged that the company's image of being environment-friendly had been undermined by the continued tirade against it by environmentalists.

In a press release here, Mr. Emmanuel Vaz, president of the association, stated that the KIOCL was one of the most environment-friendly organisations, and it had taken many steps to maintain the balance of greenery in the abandoned mining areas in the Kudremukh-Aroli range. According to satellite images from the National Remote Sensing Agency, the forest cover in the abandoned mining areas had improved to the extent of 2.75 km. between 1973 and 1997. KIOCL's own environmental monitoring cell also confirmed that over 80,000 saplings planted in the course of 25 years had provided additional coverage.

The claims made by environmentalists that the mining operations were destroying the Bhadra River were unfounded.

Mining: protest to continue

By Our Staff Correspondent

SHIMOGA, AUG. 3. The Tunga Bhadra Ulisi Horata Okkuta has decided to continue its protest against the Government's decision to allow mining in the Western Ghats region by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) for three more months. The okkuta staged a bandh in this regard on July 24.

At a press conference here on Friday, the President of the okkuta, Mr. Kalkuli Vithal Hegde, said that it was decided to stage a satyagraha at the Gopi Circle on August 9, demanding that mining be stopped in the Western Ghats.

The decision to allow mining for three months was an affront to the people living in the Tungabhadra Basin, and it was taken after the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M.Krishna, assured the noted writer, Dr. U.R.Ananthamurthy, that nothing harmful to the Western Ghats would be done.

'KIOCL has not violated any environmental law'

H 5/8/01

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, AUG. 4. The Professional Workers' Trade Union Centre of India (PWTUC) has claimed that the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) has not violated any environmental law, and the allegations that its mining had caused or would cause damage to the environment were not based on a scientific study.

In a statement today, the PWTUC, which has made several representations to Central and State ministers urging the extension of the KIOCL mining lease for another 20 years, announced plans to initiate "direct action."

These included efforts to restart operations by the workers themselves apart from planning to file a public interest litigation in the Karnataka High Court for "fixing accountability for the huge loss caused to the nation by irresponsible and thoughtless actions" that would lead to the closure of KIOCL.

The release said that over the past 30 years, the KIOCL had produced iron ore valued at Rs.9,800 crores, and its export earnings were of the same order. It provided employment to over 2,500 people, and over one lakh people in the neighbouring villages drew sustenance from it.

Closing such a "prestigious project" would be a "thoughtless action," according to the PWTUC, which also wanted the mining operations to continue until a final decision was taken to close or continue the company.

Pending a decision on an interlocutory application filed in the Supreme Court, KIOCL has been given a permit to mine ore for three months from July 24.

'Swift KIOCL closure impractical'

By Our Special Correspondent

BANGALORE, AUG. 7. The immediate closure of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) is an "impractical" move as it will affect the livelihood of nearly 5,000 people, the Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, Mr. D.B. Chandre Gowda, has said.

He told presspersons here on Tuesday that the Centre's move in filing an affidavit before the Supreme Court favouring the extension of the mining lease to KIOCL by five years was welcome.

Mr. Chandre Gowda said though he wanted the project to be closed down, he had the welfare of the families of the employees in mind. He agreed with the suggestion made by well known writer, Mr. Poornachandra Tejasvi, that the mining lease should be extended for some more time so that the employees could look for alternative sources of employment.

Reconsider Kudremukh notification: SC

Hindu 7/8/2001

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, AUG. 6. The Supreme Court has directed that the Karnataka Government should "consider afresh" the final notification which excluded 3,703 hectares of forest land from Kudremukh National Park facilitating continued mining operations by Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd.

The order was passed recently by a three-judge Bench comprising Mr. Justice B.N. Kirpal, Mr. Justice Santosh Hegde and Mr. Justice Shivraj Patil while hearing an interlocutory application filed by Mr. K.M. Chinnappa, trustee, Wildlife First, through the *amicus curiae*, Mr. Harish Salve.

The order was issued after an affidavit was filed by Mr. S.C. Sharma, Additional Director-General of Forests (Wildlife), a week ago, stating that after the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) looked into the matter afresh, "it has been decided that no approval would be given under Forest Protection Act to KIOCL to continue mining operations in any unbroken area of KNP".

The affidavit also stated that the MoEF was considering allowing KIOCL to continue operations for no more than five years. The Supreme Court's latest order has directed the State Government, and other parties concerned, to respond to this affidavit.

"The parties may give suggestions to the court with regard to such measures which may be required to be taken keeping in mind the principle of sustainable development. The State of Karnataka should consider afresh the final notification which it had issued excluding the area in question from the national park, in the light of the additional affidavit filed on behalf of the MoEF," the Supreme Court order of July 27 said.

'Baalu connived with KIOCL to stop mining'

By Our Staff Correspondent

UDUPI, AUG. 13. Mr. Vinaykumar Sorake, MP, on Monday, alleged that the Union Minister for Forests and Environment, Mr. T.R. Baalu had connived with top officials of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd (KIOCL) to stop mining at Kudremukh.

Addressing presspersons here, Mr. Sorake said that the minister and the top KIOCL officials had not given any proposal to "save" KIOCL. The Union Ministry for Forest and Environment was confused with regard to the KIOCL. It first submitted an affidavit to the court stating that mining could be continued by the KIOCL for 20 years, later it submitted another affidavit saying that mining would be allowed for only five years. There were many lobbies at the Centre, which ensured that the activities of other companies were curbed so that they could take advantage of the situation.

The future of more than 10,000 employees was at stake. Nearly 70 per cent of the transactions at the New Mangalore Port were those of the KIOCL. The closure of the KIOCL had grave economic consequences for Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts as the business at the New Mangalore Port would be badly hit.

The KIOCL was earning Rs. 650 crores by way of foreign exchange for the country. Mining at Kudremukh was a sensitive issue. A Central committee should be set up with people's representatives and KIOCL employees, besides officials from the Ministry of Forests and Environment to go into the issue of mining at Kudremukh and submit a report. Such a committee should try to "save" KIOCL.

There were several problems in the coastal districts with regard to the implementation of the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Act. The Karnataka and Kerala chief ministers would meet the Prime Minister in a few days to impress upon him the need to amend the CRZ Act as many houses of the fishermen built near the coast would have to be demolished if the zones were not redrawn. Mr. Baalu had agreed that there was a need to amend the CRZ Act. The MPs had also proposed to raise the issue in Parliament. The Indian Railways was giving a step-motherly treatment to the Konkan Railway by using it as a corridor for trains running from Maharashtra to Kerala. More trains should be introduced on the Konkan Railway, he added.

Mr. U.R. Sabhapathy, MLA, who was present at the press meet, said that the Jnanapeetha Award winner, Dr. U.R.Ananthamurthy, had agreed to hold a seminar on KIOCL mining issue. Environmentalists, people's representatives, and eminent persons would participate in it.

The KIOCL should not be closed down immediately. He wondered why the environmentalists had not opposed KIOCL when it was set up.

Govt. hasn't pushed KIOCL's case, says Motamma

H 17/8/01

By Our Staff Correspondent

UDUPI, AUG. 16. The Minister for Women and Child Welfare, Ms. Motamma, said on Thursday that the State Government had not sent any proposal to the Centre to extend the lease for mining by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) by 20 years.

Addressing presspersons here, the minister said the State Government would take a decision on the matter in consultation with the Centre after the Supreme Court gave its verdict. It was essential to balance the concerns of the environmentalists and the employees of the KIOCL. It was not possible to shift the activities of the KIOCL overnight, she said. The State Government was studying all the alternative proposals. The KIOCL should take the environmentalists into confidence on the eco-friendly measures taken by the company. The State Government had given a temporary three-month permit to the KIOCL.

Self-help groups: She said her ministry would reach the target of creating one lakh self-help groups (SHGs) under the Stree Shakti programme by the end of September. Already 64,000 SHGs had been formed and they had saved Rs. 18 crores. The 1,840 SHGs operating in Udupi District had saved a sum of Rs. 76 lakhs.

Her ministry would release grants to all the SHGs in the State by next month. The "Santwana" centres to help distressed women would be started in all the districts. Under "Santwana", women were eligible for benefits under the Udyogini, Mane Belaku and Ashraya schemes. Eggs would be provided twice a week to the children in the anganwadi centres. Protein-rich food would also be provided to mothers, and children up to three years.

Christo Fabricius

Mining: HC issues notices

By Our Correspondent

BANGALORE, SEPT. 14. A Division Bench of the Karnataka High Court on Friday ordered issue of notice to the State of Karnataka and other respondents on a public interest writ petition seeking quashing of the notification excluding 3,703.55 hectares of land from the Kudremukh National Park (KNP). The State Government issued the notification on June 16.

The petitioners — "Wildlife Aware Nature Club", a 102-member unregistered society established in 1990, and nine others from Tumkur — contended that the notification would result in the destruction of the forests, as the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. would take up mining operations on the land excluded from the purview of the KNP.

The Bench, comprising the Chief Justice, Mr. N.K. Jain, and Mr. Justice R. Gururajan, adjourned further hearing of the petition.

Seer opposes mining

M 15/9/01

SHIMOGA, SEPT. 14. Sri Gangadharendra Saraswathi Swamiji of Sri Madjagadguru Shankaracharya Sri Sonda Swarnavalli Mahasamsthanam of Mathadevala near Sirsi in Uttara Kannada District has urged the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M.Krishna, not to renew the mining lease of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL), and to drop the proposal to develop the national park at Kudremukh.

In a letter, the swamiji said mining by KIOCL would affect the fragile eco-system of the Western Ghats. It would also endanger several species in the region.

He said over 5,000 hectares of forest land in the Western Ghats had been destroyed because of mining. The Tunga, Bhadra and Netravathi would be affected if mining was allowed in the region, he added.

Concern over mining in W. Ghats

H 18/9/01

By Our Staff Correspondent

MANGALORE, SEPT. 17. The swamiji of Sri Jagadguru Shankaracharya Mahasamsthanam of Sringeri, Bharati Thirtha, has expressed concern over the deteriorating condition of the Bhadra that passes through the holy Sharada Peetham at Sringeri.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, the administrator of the temple, Mr. V.R. Gowri Shankar, has conveyed the concerns of the swamiji that the Bhadra, the lifeline of the region, was fast assuming a red colour with soil wash from the mining area, and the flow of the river was also curtailed to a great extent.

While the five-year period to wind up the operations of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) was "understandable", the letter expressed anguish over the reported pressure brought to bear by South Block on the Ministry of Environment and Forests to extend the lease to 20 years. This would have a disastrous effect on the Bhadra and the reservoir located downstream of the mining area, as the thousands of people who were dependent on this water for irrigation would be adversely affected.

The swamiji was particularly perturbed at the reports of damage caused to water sources in the Western Ghats and the storage capacity of the reservoirs being reduced.

Seer supports KIOCL

H 21/9/01

MANGALORE, SEPT. 20. The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) here has claimed that it has secured the support of Shivacharya Swamiji of Sanehalli Math.

In a press release here on Thursday, Mr. K.R.Mohan, Deputy Manager of Public Relations, KIOCL, said the swamiji, who was from Chitradurga District, recently visited the KIOCL mining site, Lakya Dam, the plant and the mini dam along with other environmentalists.

He was convinced with the steps taken by the company for protection of environment at the dam site and the mining area, Mr. Mohan said.

Ramaiah's plea to Krishna on KIOCL

By Our Staff Correspondent

TUMKUR, SEPT. 23. Mr. Y.K.Ramaiah, MLA and Chairman of the Farmers' Forum, has urged the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M.Krishna, to "keep the interests of farmers uppermost in mind" while filing an affidavit in the Supreme Court on the extension of the mining lease to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) in the Kudremukh National Park area.

In a letter to Mr. Krishna, copies of which were released to the press here on Sunday, Mr. Ramaiah said that the State should not give in to pressure from the Union Government, the KIOCL, and the vested interests.

Condemning those raising the issue of the future of those employed by the KIOCL, Mr. Ramaiah said their services could be utilised for restoring the forest in the mining area, and those interested could be offered an attractive voluntary retirement scheme.

Mr. Ramaiah said that major rivers such as Bhadra, Tunga, and Netravati took birth in Kudremukh. The Bhadra Left Bank Canal irrigated over 8,600 hectares of land. The Bhadra Reservoir had a potential to irrigate 1.06 lakh hectares. He regretted that the State had overlooked the technical reports of the STACK Committee and the Indian Institute of Science on the pollution caused due to the mining activity. The silt that flowed from the mining areas had obstructed the flow of the rivers, and crops had been affected.

Pejawar seer for debate on KIOCL's future

By Our Staff Correspondent

UDUPI, SEPT. 23. Sri Vishwesha Tirtha Swamiji of Pejawar Math has favoured a debate among environmentalists, the KIOCL employees, and scientists on the future of the company.

He was addressing a public rally organised by the Dakshina Kannada Parisaraskta Okkuta at Rajangana here on Sunday.

The swamiji said it should be a serious discussion and not degenerate into a game of one-upmanship.

The debate had become necessary in view of the contradictory statements emanating from various quarters which had created confusion in the minds of the people. The report by the NEERI had further confounded the situation.

Stressing the importance accorded to environment by rishis and saints, the swamiji said that Lord Krishna had told people to love their surroundings. The scriptures were against large equipment as they destroyed nature.

The water in the Tunga and the Bhadra had been polluted. The Government itself was telling people not to drink water from these rivers. Pollution of the rivers was nothing short of wanton destruction of nature.

11/01

KIOCL observes Vigilance Awareness Week

BANGALORE, OCT. 31. The need to evolve a code of ethics in every organisation was emphasised here on Wednesday by Mr. K.Jairaj, Managing Director, KSRTC. He was inaugurating the Vigilance Awareness Week at the corporate office of Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL).

Mr. Jairaj stressed the need to possess a positive mindset and take pride in oneself and in the organisation. He pointed out that there was a need to have vision, ensure good performance and appreciate meritocracy. He felt that these were positive elements that contributed to "wholesome integrity". Mr. Jairaj praised KIOCL for its consistently good performance.

Presiding over the function, Mr. S.Murari, Chairman and Managing Director, KIOCL, said the major elements which bred corruption were poor work-culture and complicated rules.

Entry curbs in Kudremukh National Park

By Our Staff Correspondent

MANGALORE, NOV. 5. The Forest Department has restricted free entry into the Kudremukh National Park. According to a press note from the Deputy Conservator of Forests, Kudremukh Wildlife Division, Karkala, Mr. K.N. Murthy, here on Monday, visitors will be allowed into the park on payment of an entry fee.

The release said the national park had been officially notified and, hence, entry had been restricted.

Those wanting to enter the forest area for recreation or exploration can do so by getting permission from five entry points in the Range Wildlife offices at Karkala and Kundapur in Udupi District, Kudremukh and Kerekatte in Shringeri in Chikmagalur District, and Venoor in Belthangady taluk in Dakshina Kannada District.

The release also stipulated a rate card for entry which ranges from Rs. 10 for children to Rs. 150 for foreigners.

Forest Department to get more staff

By Our Staff Correspondent

MYSORE, NOV. 16. The Minister for Forests, Ecology, and Environment, Mr. K.H.Ranganath, said here on Thursday that the Government would strengthen the staff in the Forest Department to curb smuggling activities.

Mr. Ranganath told pressperSons that the department had been facing staff shortage. The Government would take steps to identify vulnerable areas on the Karnataka-Kerala border and deploy additional staff. "Smugglers have some specific areas in the forests that are being used for smuggling, and steps will be taken to plug the loopholes," he said.

On the decline in the number of sandalwood trees, Mr. Ranganath said there was a decline in the number of trees. But sandalwood trees could not be grown elsewhere as they were parasitic plants.

About the increasing electrocution of elephants, he blamed the encroachments in the traditional migration paths of the elephants. Cutting trenches in the forest was not a permanent solution to the elephant menace. The department had been working on a plan to reduce such man-animal conflicts.

About the Gemini Distilleries, which was allegedly polluting the villages in the vicinity, Mr. Ranganath said the Government would take action after the Lokayukta submitted his report. The Government had taken up the cleaning of the Tungabhadra river with the Central assistance. Nine rivers, including the Cauvery, would be covered under the scheme.

Herbal plants authority

Earlier, Mr. Ranganath, after releasing the book, *Flora in Shimoga District*, said that the Government proposed to set up a medicinal plants authority. The Chief Minister, Mr. S.M.Krishna, had given his approval for the authority, and that a survey of plant species in the State would be taken up before setting up the authority.

17/11/01

Govt.'s decision on KIOCL welcomed

By Our Staff Correspondent

MANGALORE, NOV. 16. The Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation of Karkala in Udupi, and wildlife and Nature enthusiasts from four other districts have welcomed the Government's decision to file an affidavit to wind up mining by the KIOCL in five years.

This was stated in a letter to the Chief Minister, copies of which were released to the Press today. The letter has been signed by the convenors of the foundation, the Green Watchers of Tumkur, Nature Conservation Guild, Chikmagalur, Arohana of Mangalore, and Wildcat-C of Chikmagalur. The letter hailed the affidavit as a landmark decision, and lauded the efforts of the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M.Krishna, as a positive step. Mr. Niren Jain of the foundation told *The Hindu* that the affidavit filed by the secretary of the Department of Ecology and Environment on October 12 made the Government's intention to conserve ecology clear. Mr. Ashokvardhan of Arohana stated that Mr. Krishna had shown that he could take decisions without bowing to pressure.

18/11/01

'Don't allow mining in Kudremukh'

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, NOV. 17. Nagarika Seva Trust (NST), Mines, Minerals and People (MMP), and INCERT have urged the State Government not to permit the continuation of mining in Kudremukh, and warned that they will renew their campaign against the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) at the national level if the Government fails to respond to their demand.

Mr. Ranjan Rao Yerdoor, Mr. Ravi Rebbapragada and Mr. S. Sridhar, representing NST, MMP and INCERT, respectively, told presspersons here on Saturday that the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) had erred in recommending that KIOCL be allowed to continue mining in Kudremukh. The NEERI should withdraw its report immediately and initiate steps against those responsible for submitting such a report, they said.

Senior officials of the Department of Irrigation had reportedly levelled certain serious charges against the KIOCL, they claimed. "The KIOCL has not taken the requisite permission under Section 5 of the Karnataka Irrigation Act, 1965 for building the Lakhya Dam and two other small dams. It has not paid the water cess to the Government as required under Section 3(C) 2 of the Karnataka Irrigation Act (Levy of Betterment Contribution), 1957." The Government was reportedly not willing to disclose the contents of the reports submitted by the assistant commissioners of Puttur, Kundapur and Chikmagalur which were required for the final settlement of rights under Section 35(3) of the Wildlife Protection Act, they said.

They demanded that the Department of Irrigation should clarify its position on the reported violations of law by KIOCL and initiate remedial measures, including collection of dues and penalties from KIOCL, if any. Besides, the Government should show that it was committed to the right to information by making public the reports submitted by the assistant commissioners of Puttur, Kundapur and Chikmagalur, and the provisions of law under which a large area of land had been excluded from the notification of the Kudremukh National Park, they added.

KIOCL: Minister's action draws flak

27/12/01

By Our Staff Correspondent

TUMKUR, DEC. 26. The Union Minister of State for Steel, Mr. Brajkishore Tripathy, is said to have invited MPs from the State to visit the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) and inspect its mining area in Kudremukh National Park on January 7 and 8.

However, his action has once again attracted the wrath of environmental organisations in Tumkur District.

According to the environmentalists, who spoke to *The Hindu* here on Wednesday, Mr. Tripathy, who was under fire recently for his statement at Mangalore that the Karnataka Government should fall in line with the Centre and extend mining lease to the KIOCL for the next 20 years, held a meeting of the MPs at New Delhi early this month.

The contention of the environmentalists is that the issue is before the Supreme Court. They allege that Mr. Tripathy is trying to "influence" the court by building up public opinion in favour of the KIOCL. This, they say, amounts to disrespect to the judicial process. It will not be a surprise if the apex court considers the Minister's pro-active campaign and the MPs' visit to the controversial area as *sub judice*.

According to the activists, Mr. Tripathy has sprung a surprise after a bout of dithering actions. On July 21 last, his Ministry filed an affidavit before the apex court pleading for extension of lease for mining by the KIOCL for the next 20 years. Five days later, an amended affidavit, proposing extension for only five years, was filed. However, the Ministry retracted it and filed a fresh affidavit in October seeking extension of mining lease for 20 years.

The Supreme Court, on July 27, ordered that Karnataka explain as to how mining was permitted in the national park, and in response, the latter filed an affidavit on October 12 stating that the lease could be extended for only five years so that the KIOCL could initiate steps to wind up its mining activity in the park.

The petitioners in the case are said to be planning to file an appeal before the court in conformation to the stand taken by the State, although they differ on certain technicalities involved in enforcing the termination of lease.

The environmentalists have taken exception to Mr. Tripathy's campaign to bring pressure on the State Government through the MPs while the apex court is seized of the matter. They have started meeting the MPs to impress upon them the need to suspend mining activity in the ecologically sensitive and bio-rich rainforests of the park.

According to one environment group, the KIOCL was given time in 1995 to look for alternative mining area and the company failed to do so.

The environmentalists say that Mr. Tripathy has ignored the lapse of the company and instead has allowed the company to invest Rs.120 crore in the Mangalore Pellet Plant.

While lauding the "firm and rational" stand taken by the Krishna Government, the environmentalists want the MPs from the State to support it. They say it is the prerogative of the State to disallow mining activity and it should not yield to the pressure tactics of the Centre, even as the Supreme Court is yet to decide the case.

Stating that the Supreme Court has put on record its "support" to the efforts being made at preserving environment by pronouncing landmark judgments, the activists expressed confidence that they will win the legal battle. However, they are annoyed over the "futile attempts of the Centre" to rake up the issue outside the court, and threaten to oppose the Union Minister. They have cautioned the MPs against playing into the designs of the Union Government.

KIOCL wins CAPEXIL export award

By Our Special Correspondent

BANGALORE, DEC. 13. Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) has been given the Special Export Award under bulk minerals and ores for 2000-01 instituted by CAPEXIL.

Mr. J.C.Bahl, Deputy General Manager (Commercial), received the award from Mr. Rajiv Pratap Rudy, Union Minister for State for Commerce and Industry, at a function in New Delhi recently.

The KIOCL was selected for the award by the CAPEXIL for its excellent exports in 2000-01. Keeping up with its tradition of mining in harmony with nature.

29/1/02

Proposal for lowering KIOCL mining period

Press Trust of India
BANGALORE, Jan. 28

THE Karnataka Government has submitted a revised recommendation to the Centre to reduce the extension of mining period of Kudremukh Iron Ore Company (KIOCL) from 20 years to five years and has filed an affidavit with the Supreme Court in this regard, the Minister for Forest, Environment and Ecology, Mr Ranganath, informed the State Legislative Council today.

Responding to the notice of the BJP leader, Mr D.H. Shankaramurthy, Mr Ranganath said KIOCL had applied for extension of their mining lease in the Kudremukh area, which was expiring on July 24, 1999 (after 30 years). The application for an extension of 20 years was recommended by the State Government with several conditions.

The Union Government subsequently cleared it and granted two extensions of one year each (from July 25, 1999 to July 24, 2000 and from July 25, 2000 to July 24, 2001) under certain conditions. These (conditions) were complied by the State Government and the final notification for Kudremukh National Park was issued on June 16, 2001.

'Mining has not affected Bhadra'

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, JAN. 28. The Minister for Forests, Environment and Ecology, K.H. Ranganath, on Monday informed D.H. Shankara Murthy (BJP) that studies by the National Environmental Research Institute, and the Centre for Environmental Studies, IISc. had revealed that the mining activity in the Kudremukh area did not have any environmental impact on the Bhadra.

Replying to a motion on the matter in the Legislative Council, the minister said the State Government had not agreed to a request by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. to extend the lease period, and had restricted it to one year. He also said the company would not be allowed to expand its area of operations in the area. A revised recommendation had been sent to the Centre to reduce the mining period to five years, and an affidavit submitted before the Supreme Court, accordingly.

Assurance: The Social Welfare Minister, Kagodu Thimmappa, assured M.R. Tanga (BJP) that he would look into the allegation that the Koratagere tahsildar had ill-treated a few members of the Digambar Jain community who approached him for caste certificates.

M.P. Prakash (JD-U) urged the minister to initiate action against some persons who became presidents of local bodies in Hadagali and Kudligi in Bellary District with the help of fake caste certificates.

Mr. Thimmappa assured H.S. Shantaveerappa Gowda (BJP) that he would inquire into the allegation that bogus bills had been issued by some backward class hostels in Shimoga and Davangere districts in connivance with the chief executive officers of the zilla panchayats concerned.

Farmers' suicide: The Agriculture Minister, T.B. Jayachandra, told Mr. Shankara Murthy that 79 farmers had committed suicide due to crop loss, price fall, and inability to repay loans. Families of 26 farmers were given compensation. He said compensation of Rs. 1 lakh would be given to the next of kin of the other farmers based on the recommendations of the Veeresh Committee report, which was expected to be submitted by March 30.

Groundwater recharge: The Mines and Geology Minister, V. Muniyappa, informed Umashree (Congress) that the Government had approached the World Bank for a Rs. 471-crore proposal to raise the water-table.

Under this plan, 50,221 artificial structures to recharge groundwater would be created in 58 taluks in the next five years. Ms. Umashree wanted steps taken to improve the quality of drinking water from borewells in Bidar, Raichur, Bellary and other districts which had no other sources of drinking water.

Public sector units: The Minister for Large- and Medium-scale Industries, R.V. Deshpande, told Ramachandra Gowda (BJP) and M.C.Nanaiah (JD-neutral) that the Government would consider supporting the employees of some public sector undertakings if they made a representation to the Bureau for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction. Basavaraj Bommai (JD-S) said the same benefit should be extended to the NGEF unit in Hubli.

The minister said no private industry had come forward to participate in the tender programme to purchase the Hubli unit of the NGEF. The Government may have to resort to a voluntary retirement scheme. Mr. Deshpande also informed the member that the development of infrastructure for the food and agricultural technology parks in different places was going on.

The Primary and Secondary Education Minister, H. Vishwanath, informed Basavaraj Horatti (JD-U) that he would initiate action against those found guilty of irregularities in connection with the common entrance test for the recruitment of primary school teachers.

Greens to hold rally in Sringeri

H 27/2/02

By Our Special Correspondent

SHIMOGA, FEB. 26. The Tunga-Bhadra Ulisi Horata Okkoota has decided to hold a rally in Sringeri on March 9 and 10 to mobilise people in the region to launch a sustained agitation against mining by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd., (KIOCL) in the Western Ghats.

Kalkuli Vithal Hegde, okkoota President, told presspersons here on Monday that this decision was taken at the general body meeting of the okkoota on Sunday.

He said the proposed rally would be addressed by the leader of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, Medha Patkar, the leader of the Girijan Kalyan Samithi, B.D.Sharma, and the human rights activist, Hasan Mansur.

He said the rally would be organised on the banks of the Tunga and in the area of the Kudremukh National Park. It would be preceded by the torch light processions in different places of the eight districts in which the Tunga and the Bhadra flowed to create an awareness among the people about the likely adverse impact on the "lifeline" rivers if the mining was allowed to take place in the ecologically sensitive Western Ghats.

Referring to the reported move by the KIOCL to change the mining technology in association with an Australian company, he said it would not be at any cost allowed to implement this decision as it would damage the forest and the other natural resources.

When his attention was drawn to the Government's move to divert West-flowing rivers in the Western Ghats region to harness them for the irrigation purpose, Mr. Hegde cautioned the Government not to take any hasty decision clandestinely. The okkoota General Secretary, K.L.Ashok, said the new strategy had been prepared to fight against mining operations in and around the origins of the rivers in the Western Ghat region.

H 10/4/02

Tribal people not to move out of park

By Our Staff Correspondent

MANGALORE, APRIL 9. Tribal families living in the precincts of the Kudremukh National Park have decided not to move out of the park even if they are provided a healthy rehabilitation package.

The decision was taken at a meeting organised recently by the Dakshina Kannada Parisarasktara Okkoota, the Girijan Vikas Samiti, and the Nagarika Seva Trust.

A release here on Tuesday said 89 tribal families had been living in the park for long and protecting it. Now efforts were being made to relocate them. It would be difficult for them to live in the new area. They would submit a memorandum to the forest officials in this regard.

The release said a "Rashtriya Udyanavasigala Samrakshana Samiti" was formed to fight for the rights of tribal families. The meeting decided to organise a two-day State-level seminar on national parks.

The President of the trust, Somnath Nayak, informed the meeting that the Forest Act had provisions for regularisation of encroachments prior to 1978.

KIOCL hands over money for park

By Our Special Correspondent

10/4/02

BANGALORE, APRIL 9. The KIOCL handed over Rs. 1 crore to the State Government on Tuesday for development of the Kudremukh National Park. The cheque for the amount was presented to the Principal Secretary, Forests, Ecology and Environment by the KIOCL Director, G.S.Rajagopal. The KIOCL has been contributing Rs. 2 crore every year from 1999-2000 for the park. Apart from this, the company has also planted 85,000 trees.

Meanwhile, the company has achieved a record turnover of Rs. 712 crore for 2001-02. This shows an increase of 22 per cent over the previous year. The foreign exchange earnings of the company also increased to $ 150 million. It accounted for 5.8 million tonnes of the total exports of 8.74 tonnes.

'Divert Lakya Dam water to Bhadra Reservoir'

By Our Special Correspondent

SHIMOGA, APRIL 16. The Save Tunga Bhadra Action Committee has demanded that the entire water impounded into the Lakya Dam of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Corporation Ltd. (KIOCL) be diverted to the Bhadra Reservoir permanently closing down the KIOCL, which has done "incalculable damage" to the environment in the Western Ghat region.

In a press release, the President of the committee, Kalkuli Vithal Hegde, and the General Secretary, K.L.Ashok, have referred to the proposal mooted by the Minister for Water Resources, H.K.Patil, to persuade the KIOCL management to release one tmcft of water from the Lakya Dam into the Bhadra Reservoir to save standing crops in the Tungabhadra command area.

They said that the KIOCL, which managed to deny water to be supplied from the Lakya Dam to the Bhadra Reservoir for the last 30 years, had posed a threat to the places of the origin of the rivers, Tunga and Bhadra.

They said the Lakya Dam was being used by the KIOCL for impounding its silt after utilising a portion of its water for preparing iron ore in slurry form for being transported to Mangalore.

They appealed to farmers to join the anti-mining campaign.

'Tribal people being misled on eviction'

26/5/02

By Our Staff Correspondent

TUMKUR, MAY 25. Greenwatchers, an environmental organisation, has objected to the spreading of "unfounded fears" among people by vested interests that the Union and the State governments will give away parts of the Kudremukh National Park to multinational companies, and the tribal people living there will be evicted.

Sanjay Gubbi, Chief of Greenwatchers, told presspersons here on Saturday that some organisations had been trying to mislead the public this way since June 2001. The State Government had declared an area of 600 square km. of the Kudremukh forest a national park. The Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, D.B. Chandre Gowda, held a meeting of environmental organisations, tribal agencies, and officials of the Department of Forest on April 6 to make it clear that the decision could not be revoked. The park could not be used for any other purpose without the approval of the Centre and the Supreme Court.

Mr. Gubbi said a number of villages in the forest had not been included in the park. The tribal people living there need not fear eviction. A preliminary survey had found that they numbered 2,200, and their families 397. Vested interests were giving figures 10 times higher than these. The Government had no plan to forcibly evict them. Some tribal agencies had proposed a rehabilitation package, which would be considered if people came forward to accept it. Many of them would be happy to accept it, if they were well compensated. They were eager to get access to education, health, and civic amenities.

Mr. Gubbi said making the forest area a national park had been welcomed as a right step to protect the ecosystem. About 3,400 hectares of land, where the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited had undertaken mining, was not included in the park. Environmentalists had been campaigning for its inclusion also. A petition filed by K.M. Chinnappa of the Wildlife First in the Supreme Court seeking a direction to stop mining came up for hearing on April 29. The case was adjourned because the court was on summer vacation.

Kudremukh donation to nature resort

MANGALORE: Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd (KIOCL), which is awaiting a Supreme Court judgment on the extension of its mining lease, is now all set to donate a cage to house panthers at the Pilikula Nisarga Dhama nature resort here.

Work on the cage has apparently been completed and after a final coat of paint it would be donated to house panthers.

The 40 metres-long Rs 16-lakh cage is being donated under what the company calls its 'Meeting Social Obligations Scheme,' according to a press release here.

BRIEFLY

Panther cage for Nisargadhama

MANGALORE, MAY 31. The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) will be donating a panther cage to Pilikula Nisargadhama under its "Meeting the Social Obligations Scheme" soon.

A press release issued by the company on Friday said the Rs. 16 lakh cage was made of GI pipes and chain-link mesh. The cage would be handed over to the authorities of Pilikula Nisargadhama after painting it, the release added.

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30/7/05

Ghana envoy visits KIOCL office

BANGALORE, JULY 29. Mike Oquaye, the High Commissioner of Ghana to India, visited the corporate office of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL), here today. He held discussions with S.Murari, chairman and managing director of the company. The High Commissioner appreciated the success achieved by KIOCL in mining and the measures adopted for environmental protection. He explored the possibility of KIOCL investing in mining operations in Ghana.

Prof. Oquaye stated that Kudremukh was selected as one of the prospective investors in view of its excellent track record.

39

4 5/8/02

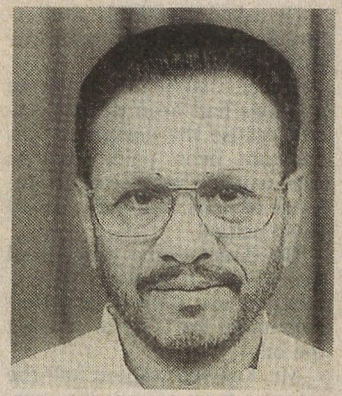
KIOCL gets a clean chit

By Our Staff Correspondent

DAVANGERE, AUG. 4. The Law and Parliamentary Minister, D.B.Chandre Gowda, on Sunday disclosed that the Government had allowed the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) to continue mining for another five years.

Answering questions from presspersons here, Mr. Gowda said the company had invested more than Rs. 5,000 crore and more than 15,000 people were dependent on it.

"How can we ask the company to shut its operations ignoring the interests of 15,000 people?" he asked, and said that mining posed no harm to natural resources or polluted any river, particularly Tungabhadra, as was being alleged.



D.B.Chandre Gowda

He asked those opposing the mining to visit the place and study the pros and cons of closing down the operations before making comments.

However, the minister parried a question on why the Government, which was so keen on protecting the interests of 15,000 people employed by the KIOCL, did not show the same interest in restarting the Kirloskar factory, which employed 2,500 people.

To a question, Mr. Gowda said the Government had discussions with the management of the Manipal Finance Corporation, where people had deposited Rs. 380 crore, and the management had promised that the depositors would get back their money.

He said that the Reserve Bank of India had long ago barred collection of deposits by financial institutions and it was wrong on the part of the corporation to have done so. The Government would once again hold discussions with the management of the corporation, he said and assured that efforts would be made to protect the depositors' interests.

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'KIOCL will have to stick to 5-yr. deadline'

By Our Special Correspondent

SHIMOGA, AUG. 13. The Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister, D.B. Chandre Gowda, said here on Tuesday that the State Government would not allow Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) to continue mining in the Western Ghats region in Chikmagalur District beyond the five-year deadline set for it to wind up its operations in the area.

Clarifying the Government's stand on the issue, Mr. Chandre Gowda, who represents the Sringeri Assembly constituency in which the area falls, told presspersons that one year had already elapsed since the Government filed its affidavit in the Supreme Court to the effect that mining would not be allowed to continue for more than five years.

Stating that the mining operations had to be wound up in a phased manner, taking into consideration the rehabilitation of nearly 5,000 workers, he said the process had already begun. The Centre had a big role to play as far as the rehabilitation of the workers was concerned.

When asked if the Centre would say "no" to the winding up of mining operation after the five-year deadline, the minister said, "We will also say no to the Centre's proposal."

Admitting that the Government had committed a folly by allowing mining in the Western Ghats, he said he was among those who had initiated the move for the establishment of the mining industry, to ensure the economic development of the Malnad region.

He said mining operations were started by the Iranian Government initially with an investment of just Rs. 5 crore. But Iran could not continue mining for long as it was involved in a war with Iraq. This forced the Centre to float a new company to continue the mining operations. The KIOCL came into being with financial assistance of Rs. 50 crore offered by the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, in the early Seventies.

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Mining: Ministers plan hunger strike

By Our Staff Correspondent

DAVANGERE, AUG. 11. A few ministers, MLCs, MLAs, and other elected representatives, and swamijis of various maths have decided to stage a hunger strike in protest against the decision of the State Government to allow the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. to continue mining for five years.

Addressing presspersons here on Saturday, H.N. Shadaksharappa, President of the Save Tungabhadra Okkuta, criticised the statement of the Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, D.B. Chandre Gowda, that the Government had decided to allow the company to continue mining after taking into account the fate of 15,000 people who were directly or indirectly employed by it.

Police failed to protect us: Environmentalists

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, MAY 17. Upset over the manner in which their recent seminar in Sringeri to highlight the plight of tribal people, who would be displaced after the notification of the Kudremukh National Park, was disrupted by a group of people who protested against the presence of environmentalist and activist, Medha Patkar, the Kudremukh National Park Virodhi Okkoota has alleged that the police failed in their duty to protect the participants.

Representatives of the Karnataka Vimochana Ranga (KVR) , the okkoota, and others said the two-day seminar which began on May 13 was intended to discuss the National park issue and globalisation.

The KVR activists said a group of people, later identified as Bajrang Dal activists, barged into the venue of the seminar and demanded that all the copies of a booklet titled "Komuvaada", published by KVR, be burnt because it made references to the Godhra incident.

They insisted that Ms. Patkar should not be allowed to step into Sringeri, let alone speak at the seminar.

The KVR activists, including academic, Nagari Babaiah, said the troublemakers left only after police intervention, and a Bajrang Dal activist was taken into custody.

The next day, however, the police did nothing to protect them, and what was worse, they suggested that the seminar be curtailed, and conducted inside the hall.

Prohibitory orders were imposed and they would not be allowed to reach the venue or leave it in large groups.

However, the KVR activists today alleged that immediately after they were asked to wind up their programme, the Bajrang Dal activists were allowed to hold their own programme at the venue, complete with loudspeakers, and other facilites.

This clearly showed the bias of the police, the KVR alleged, and demanded steps to prevent "another Gujarat" in the State.

14.14

HDL 22/10/04

Will green concerns seal Kudremukh mines?

SC panel for 5-year lease extension

Ambarish Mukherjee
NEW DELHI, Oct. 21

KUDREMUKH Iron Ore Company Ltd (KIOCL) is facing the risk of premature closure in July 2004 following the public interest litigations initiated by environment protection groups and non-Governmental organisations (NGOs).

This is because the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) which was set up by the Supreme Court in May this year to hear the case has recommended just a five-year extension of the mining lease for Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd (KIOCL), with retrospective effect from July 1999.

The company will cease to function after July 2004 if the Supreme Court accepts the committee's recommendations though the ore deposits in the company's mines are enough to continue operations till 2026.

This, according to company officials, will not only create problems on the domestic front but will also result in a failure to honour long-term contracts entered into with international buyers based in Japan, China and Iran for supply of concentrates and pellets. This would also lead to heavy penalties against the company and the burden would fall on the Central Government, which has promoted the company.

KIOCL is a 100 per cent export-oriented unit under the Ministry of Steel and the only profitable EoU run by the Government with around 2,500 employees on its roll.

Meanwhile, the temporary working permission given to the company by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) expires on October 24. Interestingly, the CEC, which is chaired by the MoEF Secretary, has informed the Supreme Court in its recommendations that the permission issued to the KIOCL by his department was illegal.

The committee, in its report to the apex court, said that "the issue of the second temporary working permission by the MoEF to KIOCL is not contemplated in the guidelines framed under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, and was in violation of the provisions of the said Act."

This has put the MoEF in a peculiar Catch-22 situation. The Supreme Court, in its last hearing of the KIOCL case, has ordered that "till further orders, mining may continue."

For KIOCL to continue mining beyond October 24, the MoEF needs to issue another fresh permission. But the CEC has already said that issuing the second temporary working permission itself was a violation of law. On the other hand, if mining does not continue beyond the cut-off date because of non-issuance of another permission by the MoEF, the Ministry faces the risk of contempt of court.

The case is scheduled to come up for hearing on October 22 .

14.14

SC reserves verdict on closing Kudremukh mining

By Our Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI, OCT. 25. The Supreme Court today reserved its verdict on the request of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company in Karnataka to permit it to continue mining operations till 2006 with adequate safeguards.

A three-judge Bench comprising the Chief Justice, B.N. Kirpal, Justice Y.K. Sabharwal and Justice Arijit Pasayat reserved the judgment at the conclusion of arguments from the senior counsel for the company, K.K. Venugopal, and other parties concerned.

The closure of the mining operations had been sought in an application filed in a pending public interest litigation, highlighting the depletion of forest cover in the country and for a direction to maintain a proper ecological balance.

Mr. Venugopal submitted that the company set up in 1969, had a 30-year lease and the agreement gave it an option for extension of the mining lease.

He said the company had taken several steps to prevent pollution of the environment and to minimise the impact on it.

He said that in 1969 nobody had analysed the issue from the aspect of impact on environment.

He further said that the company had commitment to supply raw material to foreign countries till 2006 and any abrupt closure would result not only in severe financial constraints but also a loss of face for the country in the international market besides resulting in unemployment of about 10,000 workers.

He also pointed out that the Karnataka Government had said that it had no objection to the company continuing the operations till 2006. He urged the court not to pass any order which might have retrospective effect.

Earlier, the Solicitor-General, Harish Salve, amicus curiae in the case submitted that the public sector undertaking had been granted licence for mining operations in utter violation of the Forest Conservation Act, the Forest Act and the Environment Protection Act.

He said the mining activities in the National Park had caused intensive pollution in the Bhadra river.

He wanted imposition of damages on the company as suggested by the empowered committee appointed by the court.

14.14

14 26/10/02

Mining: Ananthmurthy happy with SC order

By Our Special Correspondent

SHIMOGA, OCT. 25. "I feel very happy." This was how the Jnanpith Award winner and Kannada writer, U.R. Ananthmurthy, reacted to the Supreme Court's order to end mining by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) in the Western Ghats by July 2004.

Dr. Ananthmurthy told *The Hindu* here on Friday that KIOCL should not undertake mining till July 2004 from now, and the period should be used only for completion of winding-up formalities.

He said with the end of mining, the region would regain the lost green cover. Dr. Ananthmurthy, who hails from the Malnad area of Tirthahalli taluk in Shimoga District, offered to lead the "Shimoga bandh" observed last year as part of the agitation against mining organised under the aegis of the Tunga Bhadra Ulisi Horata Okkoota.

He also mobilised support for the agitation at a personal level. He led a delegation to the Chief Minister, S.M. Krishna, and requested him to intervene in the matter.

He had urged religious leaders, including Bharathitirth Swami of Sringeri Sharadamba Peetham, to pressure the Government to ensure an early end to mining operations.

14.14

HINDU **BUSINESS LINE** 5

BL 31/10/02

SC allows Kudremukh to mine till 2005

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI, Oct. 30

GIVING a new lease of life to Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd (KIOCL), the Supreme Court today allowed it to continue its mining activities in Karnataka till 2005, but warned that mining would have to be carried out in already broken up area.

A Bench comprising Chief Justice, Mr B.N. Kirpal, Mr Justice Y.K. Sabharwal and Mr Justice Arijit Pasayat passed the order much to the relief of the company, which has been facing uncertainties over its immediate future due to the allegation that it was carrying on mining activity in the forest area in violation of apex court orders.

KIOCL had pleaded that it should be allowed to continue mining till 2006 on the ground that it had to meet several international commitments.

Appearing for the company, senior advocate Mr K.K. Venugopal had submitted that when the company was set up in 1969, it had a 30-year lease and the agreement gave it the option to extend the mining lease.

He said the company had been taking a number of steps so as not to pollute the environment. The counsel said the State Government had repeatedly stated that it had no objection to the company carrying on its mining activity till 2006.

14.14

'Declare KIOCL mining area part of park'

By Our Staff Correspondent

TUMKUR, NOV. 8. Youth For Nature, a Tumkur-based environmental organisation, has urged the Government to notify the area under mining by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) in the Kudremukh National Park as part of the park.

The President of the organisation, S. Praveen, told pressmen here on Friday that the Supreme Court judgement against allowing mining by KIOCL beyond 2005 had saved the park which was one of the 25 biodiversity hotspots of the world.

The Government should initiate steps to acquire back parts of the park where mining was allowed.

The portions, which had been de-notified, should be re-notified as parts of the park so that the laws governing national parks would apply to them in future.

Temporary reservation of the judgement by the court on a plea by KIOCL would not pose any hurdle, he contended.

Mr. Praveen said KIOCL had occupied land for a township. The Government should transfer the land to the Forest Department for converting it into forest by 2005.

The company could be asked to move away from the township immediately.

He said the Wildlife First headed by K.M. Chinnappa, environmentalist, had filed a petition against mining by KIOCL in the apex court based on which, the closure of mining was ordered.

The environmental organisations would start an agitation if the Government delayed notifying the mining area as part of the park, he added.

H 13/4/03

Concern over laying of roads in Kudremukh National Park

By Our Staff Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 12. Environmental groups have expressed concern over the Karnataka Government's proposal to lay a network of roads in some parts of the Kudremukh National Park. The roads are being laid by the forest department for access deep inside the park.

Wildlife First and many other non-governmental organisations have appealed to the Karnataka Government to stop the project immediately and preserve the sanctity of the natural landscape by declaring the Kudremukh region as India's first roadless wilderness area.

In a letter, they have urged the State Government to save the Kudremukh forests from all development activities and provide additional field staff for patrolling.

A detailed plan should be drafted to restore the roads to their natural rainforest ecosystem.

Roads in the hilly grasslands and the 'shola' forests have damaged hundreds of trees and resulted in the removal of grass cover from slopes.

The roads formed in the steep terrain of Kudremukh, when exposed to heavy rain, are susceptible to heavy soil erosion.

The roads also fragment wildlife habitat and open up new forest areas for illegal activities such as timber smuggling and wildlife poaching, according to Wildlife First.

Laying of new roads or reviving the old ones, which are now covered with thick undergrowth, will cause damage to the terrestrial and aquatic ecosystem.

Some areas of Kudremukh forests have not been subjected to intensive human pressures due to inaccessibility. Opening up these areas will contradict the very purpose of declaring this region as a national park for the preservation of the flora and fauna of the region.

Hundreds of people trek in the roadless hill ranges of Kudremukh.

Formation of a road network will discourage nature lovers, conservationists point out.

A long-term solution for providing protection to these forests from fire and illegal activities would be through establishing regular anti-poaching camps with sufficient staff in the remote forest areas.

There are several examples of wildlife reserves with similar terrain and habitat where effective protection has been provided by the forest department without laying any roads.

Wildlife First, in its letter, quoted examples of the Brahmagiri Wildlife Sanctuary, the Eravikulam National Park and the Silent Valley National Park.

14.14

Centre may extend KIOCL mining licence temporarily

17/7/99

TOI

Business Times Bureau

BANGALORE: The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL), whose 30-year mining licence gets over on July 24, is likely to get a temporary reprieve. Although the Central government will not extend its licence, Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited is likely to get a 'temporary work permit' for one to two years, highly placed sources told *The Times of India*.

"The chairman and the managing director of the company, S. Murari, is currently in Delhi pursuing the matter, with hardly a week left," said a source.

The temporary work permit will allow the public sector company, which was caught in an environmental wrangle, to continue its mining activities, but not allow for any further prospecting for the time being.It is understood the ball has entered the court of the Central government after the Karnataka government — which was initially opposed to extension of the licence — relented.

Apparently, the change of heart was brought about by a commitment by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited to pay Rs 2 crore each year for 10 years, to the state exchequer for the maintenance of Kudremukh National Park in Chikmagalur, in whose periphery lies the mining area. The state government also realised that the non-extension of the licence would render company's 2,400 employees on election eve.

Interestingly, the Central ministry of environment had also been opposing the extension because of its belief that the open-cast mining in the area on the Western Ghats and close to the Arabian Sea could have destroyed the flora and fauna.

Poll: 20,000 in Kudremukh plan boycott

By Our Staff Correspondent

SHIMOGA, SEPT 3. Nearly 20,000 people living inside the Kudremukh national park in Chikmagalur District have decided to boycott the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections protesting against the threat of their being evicted from the park.

Stating this at a press conference, the convenor of the Karnataka Vimochana Ranga, Mr. S.Sundar said the direct action proposed by the inhabitants of the park was inevitable as their repeated plea to all political parties to protect their interests had not evoked any response.

He said his organisation in association with five others such as the Adivasi Girijana Hitarakshana Samithi from Sringeri, the Nellibeedu Samrakshana Samithi, from Karkala, the Belthangadi Refugees Association, the Karnataka Rajya Raith Sangh and the Girijana Mahila Sangh had decided to hold a protest rally at Sringeri on September 6 to demand the immediate withdrawal of permission given to develop the national park, withdrawal of permission to mine given to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd and the assurance from the Government that the inhabitants, a (majority of who were Girijans) would not be evicted from the purview of the national park. Mr. Sundar said nearly 20,000 people from five taluks in Chikmagalur and Dakshina Kannada Districts, who were living on the periphery of the proposed national park for the last few years with almost no basic amenities were now exposed to the threat of being evicted. He said the forest officials who had already demarcated the national park area after fixing boundaries had served notices on the people living inside the park area asking them to move out of it. They had also sought suggestions to fix the quantum of compensation but they could not make any headway in this regard as majority of the inhabitants refused to shift from the national park area while others demanded an exhorbitant compensation.

Mr. Sundar said the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest had renewed the permission given to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Ltd Corporation to mine the ecologically-sensitive area of Nellibeedu ignoring the objection filed by the State Government against the issuance of permission on the ground that it would cause a serious ecological imbalance in the Western Ghats belt.

Mining in Kudremukh angers greens

ToI 20/9/99

By Swati Sucharita
The Times of India News Service

BANGALORE: Environmental groups are planning to file a PIL (public interest litigation) in early October for 'infringements on the Wildlife Act 1972' committed by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd (KIOCL), for mining in the Kudremukh Valley.

The petitioners, including the Bangalore-based Environment Support Group, are planning to rope in the support of Japanese NGOs to lobby for a ban in their country on iron ore imported from Kudremukh.

The valley, located in the Chikmagalur district of Karnataka, has been declared a national park since it is one of the rare species of 'shola' (thick forest valley with hill-tops covered by grasslands), endemic only to the Western Ghats in India. With KIOCL getting a year's extension of their mining lease in July, environmentalists are particularly concerned over the fact that the decision has been taken completely ignoring the objections of the chief wildlife warden (CWW) of Karnataka.

In an unofficial note to the principal chief conservator of forests dated March 17, the CWW has concluded that "the continuance of mining activities will be injurious to the existence of wildlife in the national park" and therefore recommended to "bring to a halt all mining activities within the national park on July 27, 1999." This was the original date on which the 30-year lease, initiated in 1969 was supposed to expire.

While the Wildlife Act makes the CWW's permission mandatory for decisions like this, he seems to have been overruled in the decision of the environment ministry at the Centre.

The KIOCL's contention that the loss of flora/fauna in the reservoir area will be fully made up by its sustained green belt programme is not convincing the Greens, who contend that the species planted i.e. acacias, silver oak and eucalyptus, are not indigenous to the valley. Therefore they will not be accepted by the wild animals. As an annoyed Leo Saldanha, coordinator-trustee of Environment Support Group says, "How can you expect a lion-tailed macaque, just one of the rare wildlife species present in the forests, to switch its cuisine?"

Slurry leak causes incalculable damage

By Pramod Mellegatti

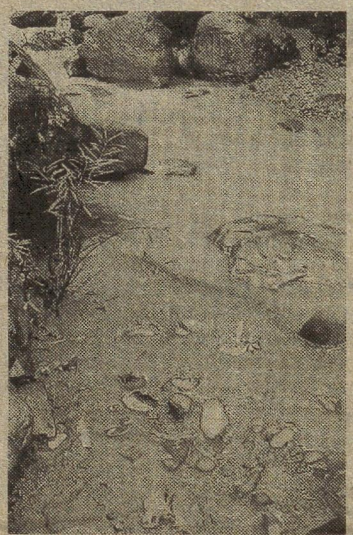
SHIMOGA, AUG. 6. The damage done by the leakage of iron slurry from the pipeline of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd (KIOCL) to the Western Ghats seems to be incalculable if the findings of a study team are any indication.

The 12-member study team from the Karnataka Vimochana Ranga (KVR) comprising journalists and social workers recently visited the area where the pipeline leaked to assess the impact on the fragile eco-system of the Western Ghats in the light of permission extended to the KIOCL to mine in the area for one more year.

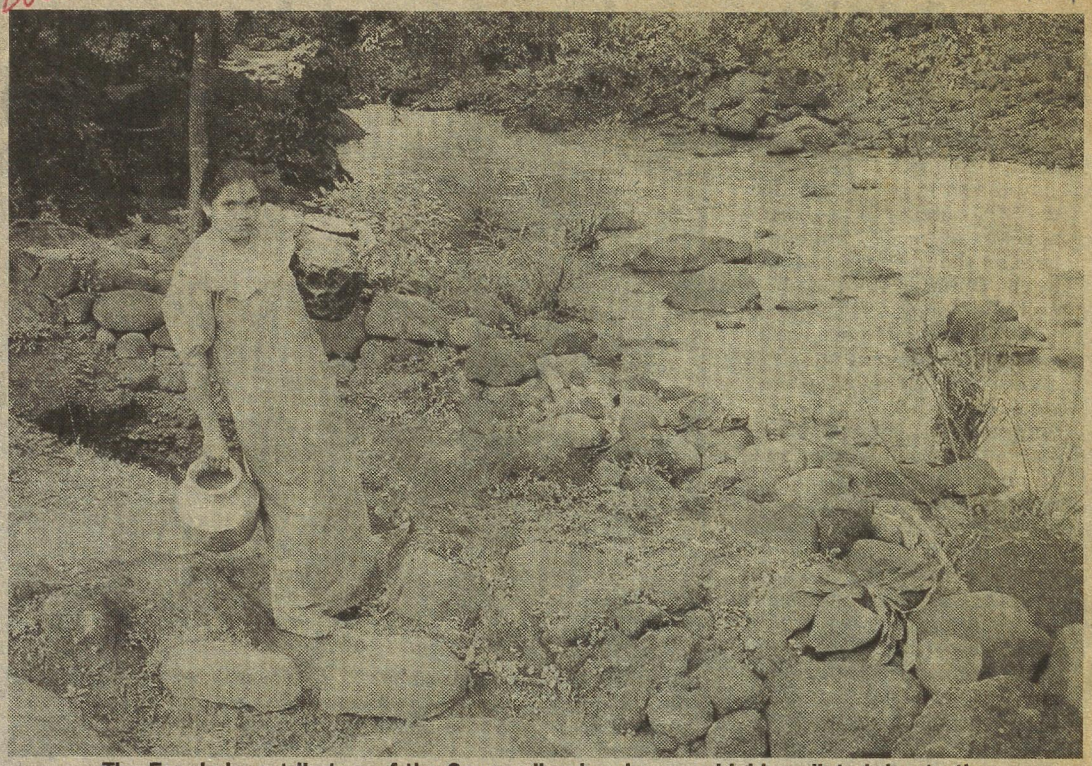
The team toured the area extensively, and after collecting first-hand information concluded that the damage done to the Ennehole — a tributary of the Souparnika river — which has been highly polluted by the leakage — is a matter of serious concern. The level of pollution in the Ennehole, which is the only source of potable water to the people residing on its banks, is to be seen to be believed. Thick layers of iron slurry floating in the tributary have rendered the water unfit for consumption.

The 97-km-long pipeline laid between the work spot at Kudremukh in Chikmagalur District and the port in Mangalore 30 years ago to transport the iron slurry appears to have outlived its utility and become obsolete if the leakages at several points are any indication. The repair of the pipeline does not appear to be a priority on the KIOCL's agenda as it cannot be done effectively considering the poor condition of the pipeline.

Further, frequent landslides in the forest make it difficult to spot the location of the pipelines as in some points it is as deep as eight metres. To get down to the damaged pipeline, the workers will have to go to a depth of 20 metres. Invariably the repairing work becomes risky. The seriousness of the leakage came to light in 1996 when three temporary coolies engaged by a private contractor for repairing a leak in the pipelines were buried alive in a landslide.



Thick layer of iron slurry blocking the flow of the Ennehole.



The Ennehole, a tributary of the Souparnika, has become highly polluted due to the leak in the slurry pipeline of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited. People on the banks of the tributary have no other sources of drinking water.

The only solution appears to be to replace the pipeline completely. The question is whether the KIOCL will do so as its mining licence has been extended for a year only. It is stated that the KIOCL can think of repairing the damaged pipeline only if the permission is extended for at least 20 years.

Mr. S.Sundara, a KVR activist, says that the seriousness of the leakage which was noticed at Kanyalu near Nooralubettu in Karkala taluk can be gauged from the fact that the leakage on a particular day (July 26) was as much as 4,000 tonnes against the transporting capacity of 15,000 tonnes of iron slurry per day. He says that as the pipeline passes through the Kudremukh National Park for a distance of nearly 40 km., it has posed a potential threat to the forest in the park area. He says that its vulnerability to the threat arises from the leakages in the pipeline which he says have polluted the Ennehole.

The level of pollution at Kanyalu is a matter of serious concern as the effluents are carried for a length of 20 km. downstream of the river. Mr. Sundara says that according to the local people the first victims in the river since the leakage in the pipeline started were fish and frogs, which have now become nonexistent. He points out that the Biological Oxide Demand (BOD) and the Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD) of the river water have come down drastically owing to the pollution which might have caused the fish and frog kill.

He alleges that the callousness of the KIOCL is such that it had not bothered to warn the people about the ferrous contents in the river owing to the leakage. As there is no other source of water, the people in the area have been forced to consume the untreated and polluted water.

Mr. Sundara ridicules the claim made by the KIOCL that it has not caused the pollution of the river. "If it is so, then why should it lift the water from the nearby Sita river for consumption of its staff in its colony instead of using the Bhadra waters?" he asks. He says that the "official" iron content in the Bhadra is 0.58 mg. against the normal permitted level of 0.3 mg., which shows the health hazard that the people downstream of the Bhadra are exposed to. He alleges that although the KIOCL has a reserve of Rs. 600 crores to clean the Bhadra it has hardly taken up the cleaning exercise so far.

Questioning the propriety of the Government extending the mining lease (mainly out of consideration for nearly 2,500 workers, who would be thrown out of employment otherwise), Mr. Sundara says the KIOCL should have made alternative arrangement to rehabilitate the workers, for it is well known that they were recruited for a specific period of 30 years till the expiry of the lease period.

Mr. Sundara cautions that the further consequences will be disastrous if the Government yields to pressure and extends permission to mine for 20 years. Besides, the KIOCL appears to be no more interested in continuing its operations on its own as its management has reportedly sought disinvestment.

He says that a U.S-based company has been retained by the KIOCL as its consultant, to hurry through the privatisation process. Before embarking on it, he says the KIOCL is trying to acquire new areas such as Gangadikallu and Nellibeedu, for fresh mining and it has been trying to obtain permission to do deep mining in the existing mines. He says that the area, which has been already identified as earthquake prone, will face the threat of frequent earthquakes if deep mining is permitted.

Mr. Kalkuli Vitthal Hegde, an environmentalist who led the study team, says that the KIOCL should consider the one-year extension period as a time to "pack off". He warns of a dangerous impact on the Western Ghats if the mining is allowed beyond one year.

Greens refute KIOCL's conservation claim

Hindu 16/10/99

By Our Staff Correspondent

SHIMOGA, OCT. 15. The decision to give temporary working permission for the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL), a public sector unit, to continue mining operations in the Western Ghats has come in for criticism from environmentalists.

The only way to ensure protection of the region was to ask the unit to leave the place, they said.

Reacting to a report in *The Hindu* dated October 12 saying that the Government has decided to renew the permission given to the KIOCL to undertake mining, the Chikmagalur based environmentalists, Mr. S.Girija Shankar and Mr. D.V.Girish, have contested the claim of the unit that it has been protecting the environment in the Western Ghat region of Chikmagalur District.

Speaking to this correspondent over phone on Thursday, they termed the claim reportedly made by the Executive Director of the KIOCL, Mr. K.V.Thyagarajan, that his concern had taken pollution control measures as false and added that the damage done by the unit to the Western Ghats, Shola forests, and the Tunga and Bhadra was of grave concern.

They alleged that the KIOCL had destroyed thick forests for the approach roads to the iron ore reserves and contested the claim that it had taken up afforestation in place of the forests destroyed.

The unit had raised mono-cultured species such as acacia, casuarina and eucalyptus, which were not suited to the malnad region.

Alleging that the KIOCL has destroyed the salubrious climate of the region, they questioned the wisdom of having allowed mining operations in the ecologically sensitive Western Ghat region, which "formed the backbone of the eco-system of the State".

The claim of implementing a master plan for forestry and ecology drawn out by Mr. Y.M.L.Sharma, former Chief Conservator of Forests, was not true.

It was also false that 75 lakh saplings had been planted on the hills and areas after mining. It was an attempt to hoodwink the public.

They said that the claim of the KIOCL that it let out mine wash after filtering was far from true if the heavy deposition of ferrous contents and colouring of water of the Bhadra was any indication.

They alleged that the Tunga and Bhadra, considered to be the "lifelines" of the State, were threatened by the mining operations. They said that the occurence of earthquakes in the region, which were not common, could be attributed to mining.

It was ridiculous that the KIOCL had proposed to undertake an environmental impact study by the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) of Nagpur and by the Wildlife Institute of Dehradun as the fragile ecosystem of the region had been undergoing destruction for 30 years.

Such studies did not have relevance, if the local environmental organisations were not associated.

They said it was unfortunate that the KIOCL had sacrificed the environment of the region by seeking extension of the permission for mining operations for the sake of nearly 3,000 employees. It should instead be asked to shift its operations elsewhere.

The Western Ghat region had suffered heavy losses in 1966, when nearly 260 sq.km of the Bhagawati forest was destroyed in a fire.

A study had found out that hardly four per cent of the region had natural forests. If the remaining forests was destroyed, it could not be regenerated.

IE 9/11/99

Kudremukh Co may face rough weather

VINAY MADHAV
BANGALORE NOV 8

THE Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL), which has been conducting mining operations at Kudremukh in Chikmagalore for the last 30 years, is likely to face rough weather after an year.

Though the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has extended the mining lease, which lapsed on July 29, the MoEF, while issuing the temporary working permit, ruled out any commitment on the part of the Centre for final approval to extend the lease.

In the first place, the Centre has granted temporary working permission only in the already broken up area of 1452 hectares for either a period of one year or until a final notification for Kudremukh National Park (KNP) has been issued, whichever comes first.

The Centre has also directed the State to finalise the process of final notification of the KNP during this period.

The Survey of India will be conducting a survey and demarcating the boundaries of the KNP during this period.

Meanwhile, following the Centre's direction, the Kudremukh Wildlife Division Deputy Conservator of Forests (DCF) Madhu Sharma has warned KIOCL against breaking up any fresh areas at Kudremukh.

"The boundary of broken area will be demarcated immediately on the ground, and pillars be erected.

A map of this will be prepared and signed by KIOCL authorities and Forest Department officials.

The cost of the survey and the erection of the pillars will be borne by the KIOCL," Madhu Sharma stated.

Madhu Sharma has also asked KIOCL to give an undertaking stating that company would not violate any of the clauses of the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 and Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 during this period and also bear the cost of environment impact assessment and impact on wildlife studies at Kudremukh. KIOCL will also have to pay the lease rent and comply with any other demand made by the State or Centre during the temporary working permission period.

FINAL NOTIFICATION: Meanwhile, the Government is getting ready to issue a final notification on the Kudremukh National Park and has appointed the Chikmagalur Assistant Commissioner (AC) to survey the area.

Along with the people living in and around the National Park, the KIOCL also has submitted a statement of objection to the AC, appealing to him to exclude Nellibeedu and Gangrikal areas from the purview of the National Park.

KIOCL / DISINVESTMENT PLANNED IN TWO PHASES

Joint venture partner sought for equity participation

By M.Raghuram

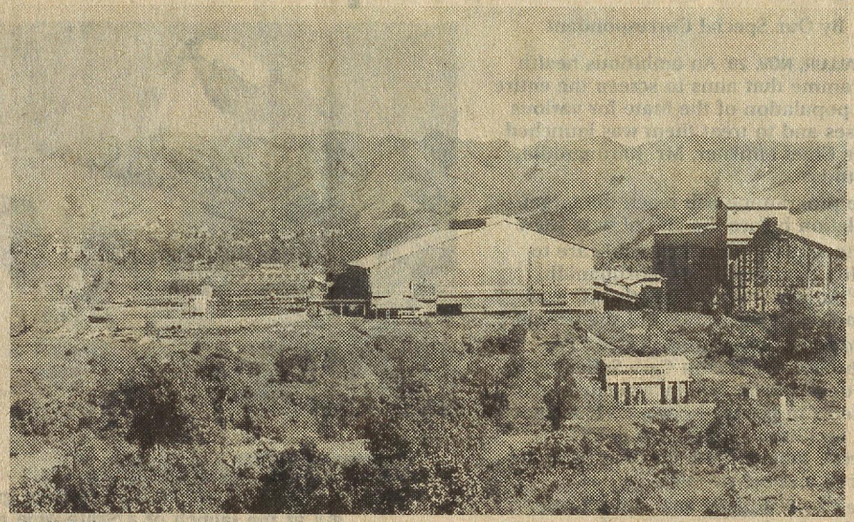
MANGALORE, NOV. 29. The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL), the first core sector company to be started with part international funding, is now looking for international partners such as the Chinese and the Japanese. It is said that the KIOCL will become a joint venture after the proposed two phase disinvestment of stocks.

The company has had mixed fortunes in the 23 years of its existence, and is now set to become a future world leader in iron ore exports. The disinvestment pattern, which is being worked presently envisages that the Government will hold 51 per cent stakes, which will keep the interests of the country intact in steel sector exports.

Why KIOCL has now attracted the Eastern market has been attributed to its strategic positioning. China and Korea, which are the main exporters of steel in Asia (and Africa) consider KIOCL as a more economical source to import from, one of the main inputs in the import costs being transportation and labour as the KIOCL has completely mechanised its operations in both concentration and pellet forms, the labour input works out to be very economical. The importers do not mind even if the iron-ore available at Kudremukh is of low grade (36-38 per cent) as the overheads will compensate for the grade. The Kudremukh range of the Western Ghats has always been a favourite hunting grounds for iron ore for miners from the Mysore Regency.

Prospecting for minerals in the Old Mysore state was never easy. Prospectors on horseback and some "ironmen" such as late Sampath Iyengar of the Mysore Regency, discovered vast expanses of iron ore in 1913 in the Aroli Gangamoola range of the Western Ghats. Iyengar's studies indicated that the range had over 700 million tonnes of iron ore and further prospecting showed that the adjacent range in Gangrikal and Nellibeedu also had similar reserves which the KIOCL acquired on lease for 25 years.

The actual mining was supposed to have been taken up under the funding of MARCONA of the U.S. and the MON group in Japan. But after the final pilot project, the proposal was shelved due to inaction. At this point, the Government of Iran under the Shah's regime shared keen interest in the project. Under an agreement, the Government of Iran paid $ 630 million for setting up the concentration plant at Kudremukh. But, half way the project suffered a setback due to the political crisis in Iran. As it was destined to be a completely Indian project, the Government of India completed the plant at Kudremukh and at Mangalore with no cost and time overruns.



The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited, which is entering an international phase in its operations.

The KIOCL's concentration plant adopted one of the most modern technologies which was on par with most advanced iron-ore companies in developed countries. This made the KIOCL, a 100 per cent export oriented unit which status it maintains even today. The recent ISO 9002 certification was another feather in its cap. Earning forex of $ 150 million per annum, the company has been recording consistent growth in its turnover from Rs.116 crores during 1988-89 to Rs. 548 crores in 1998-99.

The company had its share of conflicts with the ever vigilant environmental lobby in the district. But, the company had adopted pollution control measures in its day-to-day operational repertoire right from day one. Considering the magnitude of mining operations, the damage to the environment was restricted to the bare minimum.

The company by using earthen technology, constructed a dam across one of the tributaries of the Bhadra to arrest solid waste in the mining operations and to supply water for the project. The dam cost the company Rs. 116 crore. The company has also evolved a monitoring system for maintaining quality water in the reservoir.

During monsoons the excess water is allowed to overflow through a tunnel spillway into the Bhadra river after stringent monitoring is done of the quality of water and the level of the tailing deposit. Special care is also taken to check the carriage of loose-mined material with the help of two separate dams in the valleys ensuring that only clean water flows into the Bhadra river. Such a natural filtering process of the river water has been adopted perhaps for the first time in the country.

To maintain the ambient quality of air in the project site, the company has a fleet of truck-mounted sprinklers deployed in the mining area to continuously sprinkle water over the mine haul roads and to suppress the dust arising out of the movement of heavy equipment during the dry season. The KIOCL has gone one step further in eco-preservation in its plant site and has been continuously filling discarded areas with trees and vegetation under the guidance of Mr. Y.M.L. Sharma, who retired as Chief Conservator of Forests.

A master plan for replenishing the lost forest cover has also been systematically implemented by the company. It has planted 75 million saplings of which 60 per cent are flourishing and have covered the bald hills with thick foliage. It has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Mangalore University to identify rugged local varieties of trees for planting in the mine-abandoned places.

The KIOCL has also been confirmed with the prestigious Abheraj Baldote environment award by the Federation of Indian Mineral Industries for its outstanding contribution to the national goal of sustainable development through environmental conservation and rational utilisation of natural resources. The KIOCL has not forgotten its roots and has laid out a herbal garden in six acres near the KIOCL township, which has become a research site for many botany students in Mangalore University.

The philosophy of the company, according to Mr.K.V.Thyagarajan Executive Director, is co-existence of nature and nature's bounty for the welfare of society without sacrificing the environment.

Mr.Thyagarajan is positive that with the reserves being in abundance, with the environmental feasibility being determined and the company being committed beyond questionable levels, it is time that KIOCL should have an international partner in its operations and for equity participation.

Environmentalists plan rally at Kudremukh

By Our Staff Correspondent

SHIMOGA, MAY 3. A rally is being organised at Kurdremukh in Chikmagalur District on May 8 to request the Government not to renew permission given for mining to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Corporation Ltd (KIOCL) — a public sector undertaking — which expires in June, and to protest against the proposed development of the Kudremukh National Park, as both are "inimical" to the environment of the Western Ghat region.

The rally is being organised under the joint auspices of the Karnataka Vimochana Rang, the Adivasi Girijana Hitarakshana Samithi, the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sanga, the Tunga Moola Ulisi Horata Samithi (Save the Origin of the Tunga Action Committee) and the Nellibeedu Samrakshana Samithi, and will be followed by a seminar at Sringeri on May 10 and laying "siege" to the Aranya Bhavan in Bangalore on May 12.

Stating this at a press conference here on Wednesday, the convenor of the Karnataka Vimochana Rang, Mr. Kalkuli Vitthal Hegde, said that such a protest had become inevitable as the mining conducted by KIOCL in and around Kudremukh in the past 30 years had caused incalculable damage to the flora and fauna in the verdant Western Ghats which, of late, had become fragile environmentally due to over-exploitation of its natural resources.

He said that continuous mining had not only destroyed the biodiversity of the Western Ghats, but also polluted the Bhadra river making the water unfit for drinking in some parts downstream. He said the heavy iron content in the water had gravely affected the crops on either side of the river.

Mr. Hegde said the bio-diversity of the Western Ghats, which had been identified as one of the 18 "hot spots" in the world, had been threatened severely because of the mining.

The lion-tailed macaque, 32 per cent of which were to be found only in the Western Ghats, were on the verge of extinction because of the unsafe habitat. Five unique varieties of fish found only in the Bhadra river had become extinct.

He said the 30-year lease period for mining which expired last June was extended only by a year. As the expiry date was approaching, hectic efforts were being made to renew permission for mining for a longer period. He cautioned that the Government would be guilty of damaging the ecology and environment of the Western Ghats if it yielded to pressure to renew mining operations.

Mr. Hegde said what was more disturbing was that the KIOCL proposed to take up the mining operations in Nellibeedu and Gangadikallu, which formed the origin of the Tunga and Bhadra rivers, as the areas mined had already exhausted the ore content. If the KIOCL was given permission to mine in these new areas it would "be suicidal" for these rivers as they would dry up completely.

He said environmentalists were also opposed to the construction of a 90-feet dam across the Kattigehole — the main tributary of the Bhadra river — for impounding water for power generation as it would lead to serious depletion of water in the river course.

Although the KIOCL had been incurring losses, attempts were being made to project it as a profit-making unit with the sole intention of selling it to a U.S-based company. This was borne out by the fact that the National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) had been asked to withdraw its investment in KIOCL.

Mr. Hegde criticised the proposed development of the Kudremukh National Park in an area of 1.58,000 acres in Sringeri, Koppa and Mudigere taluks in Chikmagalur District, and in Belthangady and Karkala in Udupi District, stating that this was being done to encourage multinationals to set up hotels and resorts, which would have no genuine concern to protect wildlife.

He said this would lead to the eviction of nearly 20,000 tribal people residing in the forest area. The forest had remained intact in the area earmarked for the development of the park so far because the tribal families had assiduously protected the terrain.

Mr. Hegde regretted that candidates (irrespective of their party affiliations), who had signed an undertaking during the last Assembly and Lok Sabha elections that they would support the agitation against renewing permission to the KIOCL for mining had chosen to become non-committal after the elections.

The State President of the Karnataka Vimochana Rang, Mr.Chandraskehar Goramal, said it was only by discouraging KIOCL from undertaking mining operations and by not developing the national park that the ecological balance in the Western Ghats could be maintained.

'Don't renew mining contract of KIOCL'

By Our Staff Correspondent

SHIMOGA APRIL 15. The Nature Conservation Guild and the Wild Cat.C have urged the Union Government not to renew the mining contract of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) after it expired on July 24.

In a pressnote, the convenor of the guild, Mr. B.S.Narasimhamurthy, and the convenor of the Wild Cat.C, Mr. K.R.Aravind, said that the efforts of the KIOCL to get the contract renewed was a matter of concern, and the company's plans to get more areas in the Western Ghats for mining was "disturbing".

They demanded an inquiry into the manner in which the KIOCL managed to secure mining rights in the name of "exploratory mining" in the 900-hectare area at Nellibeedu in the Kudremukh National Park. The company had damaged the bio-diversity of the area by laying roads and by tree felling. They said that the company, selected for the Friend of Environment Award, had destroyed natural forests on the plea that it would develop "compensatory" forests.

Having damaged the eco-system of the Western Ghat region, the KIOCL was "eyeing" the Gangadikallu area for mining. If it succeeded in its efforts, the Bhadra would be threatened, they said.

Huge tracts of forest land was destroyed following the repairs on the pipeline between Kudremukh and Mangalore for transporting iron ore slurry for which the 60-feet-wide roads were laid in violation of the Wildlife Conservation Act and the Forest Act.

The environmentalists took exception to the approval given by the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board to the construction of a dam across the Kabigehole by the KIOCL even after the participants at the public hearing held for the purpose opposed the project unanimously.

They urged the Forest Minister to initiate legal action against the KIOCL for destroying the forests.

Hindu
19/5/2000

Forest Dept. opposes denotification move

By Our Staff Correspondent

MANGALORE, MAY 18. The Forest Department has expressed its opposition to the Government's move to denotify the Kudremukh national park area in the Western Ghats. This assumes significance in view of the Government coming under pressure to lease the area for mining.

The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) has been hoping to exploit the rich mineral reserves in Gangrikal and Nellibeedu.

The State Government had sought the opinion of the department on denotifying the area, which is spread over Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Chikmagalur and Shimoga districts. The World Wildlife Federation has identified the Western Ghats range that includes the Kudremukh national park among the 14 hot spots of the world for its bio-diversity.

Following strong lobbying from the mining companies, the Centre had directed the State Government to take steps to de- notify the Gangrikal and Nellibeedu areas coming under Kudremukh national park. The State Government referred the matter to the Forest Department.

Expressing its opposition, in its report, the department has said: "There are no other forest areas in Karnataka more deserving than Kudremukh to be declared as a national park."

The Chikmagalur Deputy Commissioner is reported to have sent a Rs. 5,000-crore rehabilitation plan for the dwellers of national park area. But the Forest Department has said that there was no need to shift the people living inside the national park area as their activities posed no threat to the flora and fauna.

It is said that the letters received from the State Government indicated its intention to denotify the Gangrikal and Nellibeedu reserves and also to extend the lease period to 10 years for KIOCL.

Meanwhile, the department has slapped a fine of Rs. 5 lakhs on the KIOCL for carrying out unspecified work which posed threat to forests.

The Bio-diversity Initiative Trust, headed by Prof. S.A.Hussain, who has written to Mr. Nagaraj Shetty, Additional Chief Secretary and Principal Secretary, Department of Forests and Ecology, about the work in the national park area, has said that the area was endowed with rich flora and fauna, which were not found in any other place in the southern peninsula.

Also, it was one of the hot spots identified under the Treaty of the Biodiversity Convention to which India was a signatory, he said.

The treaty stipulated the signatory country should take measures to preserve its diverse resources. This made it binding on India's part to ensure that the area was not decimated.

The trust has come out with valuable data about the rich biodiversity of the area in its book *Biodiversity of the Western Ghats Complex of Karnataka — Resource Potential and Sustainable Utilisation.*

PAV 30



Mr. H.R.Basavarajappa, General Secretary of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, inaugurating the 'Save Tunga and Bhadra' jatha by beating a 'tamata' in Shimoga.

'Save Tunga, Bhadra' jatha launched

26/12/2000

By Our Staff Correspondent

SHIMOGA, DEC. 25. A 10-day "Save Tunga and Bhadra Rivers" jatha was launched here on Saturday under the auspices of the Tunga Bhadra Ulisi Horata Okkoota to enlighten the people about the imminent threat to the sources of these rivers.

The General Secretary of the State Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, Mr. H.R.Basavarajappa, who formally inaugurated the jatha by beating a drum at the Ameer Ahmed Circle, emphasised the need to organise people for a sustained struggle against the reported move of the Union and State Governments to renew mining license of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Corporation Ltd. (KIOCL) for the next 20 years.

He warned that the sources of the Tunga and the Bhadra which were the lifeline of the State would dry up completely if mining was allowed to be taken up in Gangadikallu and Nellibeedu in their vicinity.

The Secretary of the Karnataka Vimochana Ranga, Mr. K.L.Ashok, said that the jathas which were set off on foot by volunteers of as many as 35 environmental organisations simultaneously in Chikmagalur, Shimoga, Davangere, Bellary, Koppal and Raichur districts.

These districts are situated on the banks of the Tunga and the Bhadra. The jathas were to create awareness among people about pollution of the two rivers caused by the release of the effluents by industries on their banks.

18/6/00
Hindu

under the provisions of the Forests Act, and giving clearance to the respondents to grant lease of forest lands in the Kudremukh National Park for mining to multinational companies and domestic companies.

The petitioner has filed this writ petition aggrieved by the threat to the Kudremukh National Park by the action of the respondents.

The national park was situated in the Western Ghats over an extent of 6,00,032 hectares in Dakshina Kannada, Udupi and Chikmagalur District, he said.

The petitioner said he had come across a newspaper report saying that the PMO had asked the State Government to allow mining in Kudremukh Park. If this was permitted, it would result in pollution and an ecological imbalance.

The judges adjourned further hearing of the petition.

Plea to stop mining

In another public interest writ petition filed by Mr. B.Krishna Bhatt, he sought a direction to the Chief Conservator of Forests to restrain the State of Karnataka from exercising power

Survey of Kudremukh Park ordered

By Our Staff Correspondent

UDUPI, JUNE 30. Mr. Gaurav Gupta, Deputy Commissioner, on Wednesday directed the Assistant Commissioner and the Forest Department officials to jointly conduct an inspection and a survey of the Kudremukh National Park.

The Deputy Commissioner was presiding over the District Co-ordination Committee meeting here.

The Forest Department officials said the Supreme Court had directed that a report regarding the boundary of the National Park should be sent to it within a year. The time limit set by the Supreme Court was fast approaching. While the neighbouring district had sent a report, no report from Udupi District had yet been sent.

The Assistant Commissioner said that he had sought the details of survey numbers in the area from the Forest Department, but so far he had not got any response. The Forest Department officials countered this by saying that it was impossible to give details of survey numbers. Mr. Gupta then asked the AC and the department officials to work jointly and resolve the matter.

Mr. Gupta directed the district officials to take seriously any matter regarding atrocities committed on Koragas, a Scheduled Tribe in the district. A report about any such atrocities could be given to him by the Superintendent of Police. Mr. Gupta asked the departmental heads to prepare proposals for construction of their offices on government land available in the city.

Vimochana Ranga to protest in Bangalore

Hindu 29/7/2000

By Our Staff Correspondent

SHIMOGA, JULY 21. The Karnataka Vimochana Ranga in association with other organisations has decided to hold a demonstration in Bangalore on Monday when mining license of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) expires, to press the Government not to renew it (license) in view of the incalculable "damage" it has caused to the eco-system in the Western Ghat region.

The Vice-President of the State unit of the Vimochana Ranga, Mr. S.Sundara, in a release here on Friday said that the volunteers of various progressive organisations from Shimoga, Davangere, Hospet, Chikmagalur and Raichur would participate in the demonstration.

He said that while the surreptitious meetings being held by the Union and the State Governments at various levels to favourably consider the request by the KIOCL for renewal of license for another 20 years had been a matter of concern with the reported leak of a pipe carrying iron slurry had aggravated damage to natural resources in the forest area.

He said it was ironical that the Union Government had chosen the KIOCL for its National Environmental Award despite the fact that the Forest Department had served a notice and levied a fine of Rs.5 lakhs on it for having caused damage to forest area.

Detailing the efforts made by various environment organisations to mobilise public opinion against the renewal of mining license of the KIOCL, Mr. Sundara said that his organisation in association with the Adivasi Girijana Hitarakshana Samithi held a demonstration in front of the Chief Principal Conservator of Forest in Bangalore in May last urging him to take steps to stop mining in the Western Ghat region.

He said that he had assured the demonstrators that mining license would not be allowed to be renewed and had even shown the recommendation made by the Secretary to Forest Department to the Government suggesting that the license to mine be not renewed. Now that the authorities concerned were silent at a time when the Government was considering favourably the renewal of license only showed that they had yielded to the pressure tactics of the KIOCL, he alleged.

He said that the Vimochana Ranga had been protesting against mining by the KIOCL ever since it took up prospective mining in Nellibeedu and Gangadikallu which formed part of the Kudremukh National Park in 1992. It organised a "Cycle Jatha" in 1994 from Sringeri to Hospet to create awareness among the people residing on the banks of the Tunga and Bhadra about the extent of pollution being caused by KIOCL activities which entailed release of effluents and other residue into rivers.

He cautioned that the Tunga and Bhadra would dry up completely if mining resumed as their places of origin fell near the areas proposed to be leased out for deep mining. He said that environment organisations would not allow mining in the ecologically sensitive areas.

PM urged not to extend KIOCL mining lease

By Alladi Jayasri

BANGALORE, JULY 22. With last Tuesday's leakage of iron ore slurry in the KIOCL's slurry pipeline passing through dense forests of the Western Ghats proving to be more disastrous than it was at first reported, the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd.'s chances of getting a fresh 20- year lease on mining right in the area seem to be getting slimmer.

Meanwhile, missives from various quarters are being sent to the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B.Vajpayee, asking him to refrain from extending the mining lease to the KIOCL, its earlier 30-year lease having ended in July 1999. A 12-month temporary permit is due to expire on July 24.

Photographs showing what has now been termed one of the worst ecological disasters — the Yennehole river that passes through 23 villages flows black and thick with slurry — have been made available to *The Hindu*. The leak occurred near Bajagoli, 3 km off Kaniala in the Karkala Range, within the Kudremukh National Park. It is barely six months since the Karnataka State Forest Department booked a case against the KIOCL, for damaging the forest by doubling the width of the existing pipeline tracts inside the national park, and using heavy machinery including earthmovers, in violation of the conditions laid by the department.

It is now the turn of Sri Bharathi Theerta Swamiji of Sri Sharada Peetam, Sringeri, to join the chorus of protests against the move to extend the mining lease for the KIOCL.

Emulating Sri Vishwesha Theerta Swamiji of Pejawar Math, Udupi, who recently wrote to Mr. Vajpayee, the Sringeri pontiff has taken a stern view of the damage to the water and soil in the Western Ghats region that the KIOCL's operations within the Kudremukh National Park is causing.

The letter, a copy of which is available with *The Hindu*, exhorts the Prime Minister to listen to the voice of "the thousands of concerned citizens in around Sringeri" which also happens to be the seat of the first and the most important of the four Amnaya Peethas established by Adi Shankaracharya 1,200 years ago.

The Sringeri pontiff notes that the news of the request of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to the Karnataka Government to denotify all survey numbers under the Kudremukh National Park to facilitate continuation of mining operations by KIOCL is very disturbing.

That additional areas of Gangrikal and Nellibeedu are being sought to be released for mining operations despite the fact that Gangrikal is the main catchment area of the Tunga river (Ganga Moola), is alarming, the letter says.

Further, there is ample evidence to show that the mining operations of KIOCL have polluted the river Bhadra as well, and the ecological disturbance caused could be beyond repair, Sri Bharathi Theertha Swamiji says.

"We are not experts in the field of ecological studies, but are deeply concerned at the prospect of the green neighbourhood being diminished and the pristine pure water being polluted," the Swamiji says, urging Mr. Vajpayee to consider the pros and cons before issuing mining licences to the KIOCL.

Another missive is from Wildlife First, an NGO, that appeals to Mr. Vajpayee to stop grant of the mining lease to the KIOCL. The letter contends that 25 years of mining activity in the ecologically sensitive region have only had the "most minimal gain". The KIOCL's mining operations are a classic case of improper siting, and goes against the agenda set forth in the National Conservation Strategy and Policy Statement on Environment and Development.

The KIOCL, according to them, has violated several conditions imposed by the State Government while prospecting for iron ore at Nellibeedu, apart from which it has blatantly violated pollution norms by releasing mine wash into the Bhadra river — water from downstream Bhadra up to Lakkavalli dam has been found to be 57 per cent magnetic when tested in a laboratory, Wildlife First alleges.



The Yennehole river, which is thick with iron ore slurry from a leakage in KIOCL's pipeline.

'State has no hand in extending KIOCL lease'

Hindu July 31 2000

By Our Staff Correspondent

HASSAN, JULY 30. The Forest Minister, Mr. K.H.Ranganath, has said that a timeframe will be set to dispose of long-pending cases against smuggling of forest produce.

Addressing a press meet after reviewing the functioning of the Forest Department here on Sunday, Mr. Ranganath said that he would take up the matter with the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M.Krishna, the Law Minister, Mr. D.B.Chandre Gowda, and the Chief Justice of the High Court. As many as 194 cases against smuggling of 27,000 tonnes of sandalwood worth nearly Rs. 57 lakhs had been pending in Hassan. The value of the produce smuggled from the forests in the State was high. Stating that the punishment for such acts should be at least rigorous imprisonment for three years and "heavy" fine, he said that the present laws were insufficient to deter smuggling.

Referring to the problem of lack of space in the yards of the department, he said that the rent collected by the department from the bidders for storing the auctioned goods in the yards would be increased. If it was not paid in time, interest would be charged for the arrears. The bidders were not claiming the goods immediately after auction, he added.

Stating that there was less scope for afforestation in the Malnad region with the increase in the number of coffee plantations, the minister said that a plan would be formulated for increasing the revenue from the existing areas. This had to be carried out by adhering to the Supreme Court ruling on use of forest produce. The objections raised by the environmentalists should also be considered. Though there were enough trees in the region, the department was not earning revenue.

Mr. Ranganath said that there were not enough surveyors to estimate the area of encroached forest land. As many as 97,000 families had encroached 89,000 hectares of forest land in the State. Most of the encroachments were made by nearly 125 large landowners. Instructions had been issued to the Deputy Commissioners to regularise the encroachments made before 1978 as per a Supreme Court ruling. Eviction notices would be issued to those who have encroached forest lands after that year.

He said that directions had been issued to the Forest Department officials to make a long-term plan to prevent elephants from straying into human habitats in various parts of the State. Stating that fragmentation of their habitat had caused such instances, he said that a suggestion to provide food to elephants near waterholes was being pursued. Digging of trenches and tranquilising of the animals created problems, he added.

Referring to the extension of mining lease to the KIOCL by one year, he said that the decision was not taken by the State Government, and the issue was handled by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests. The Government had proposed to the Centre that KIOCL be allowed to carry out mining for 20 years.

The minister said that the forest cover in the State had increased by nearly four percent and it comprised 21 per cent of the total geographical area. He admitted that the concept of social forestry had not become popular, and added that effective functioning of the village forest committees were hampered by certain problems. He said that the Forest Department would try to attract tourists to various forest resorts and destinations by providing improved facilities. Steps would be taken to improve the deer park at Gendekatte Forest. A peacock park would be established there. The forests such as Bisale in Hassan District would be opened up for tourists, he added.

Eco report dampens KIOCL prospects

Decca Related 22/4/2001

By Sunil Kumar M
DH News Service

BANGALORE, April 21

In what could virtually seal the future prospects of Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (Kiocl), a Rapid Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Report has said that no mining should be allowed in Gangdikal and Nellibeedu areas. The study, commissioned at the instance of the Ministry of Environment and Forests to look into the impact on flora and fauna of the Kudremukh National Park, has said it would cause immense damage to the biodiversity and water resources in the area.

The opening up of Gangdikal would have a permanent effect on the Kudremukh plateau between northern and southern portions of the park, besides making an impact on the Tunga river system which is at present not under any influence of mining. This would also make it totally incompatible with the existence of a National Park in this biodiversity rich region, the study says. Mining at Nellibeedu would directly open up 321 hectares(ha) of grasslands and the unique shola forests.



A view of the grass lands in Kudremukh national park.

While Forest Department officials refused to comment, environmentalists, however, hailed it, stating that it gives necessary impetus towards preventing mining in protected areas and that it would be illegal if the government goes ahead and extends the lease for new areas.

The report has been prepared by a team of ecologists and engineers of the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Department of Civil Engineering, Indian Institute of Science among other institutions.

Submitted in February 2001 to the ministry, the report will form the basis for it to decide on whether the 30-year lease, which expired in July 1999, should be renewed. It will also decide whether fresh areas at Gangdikal and Nellibeedu inside the Kudremukh National Park should be given for mining.

KIOCL has been pressing for renewal of the mining lease for another 20 years. The proposed area is about three times the area (1,233 ha) mined presently. A temporary mining permit for one year was issued last year allegedly under pressure from the Prime Minister's Office against the wishes of Forest Department on condition that no new areas will be mined.

The PMO also urged the State Government to exclude the proposed areas and all other areas held by KIOCL from the final notification of the park.

who did the EIA?

Rare species of frog found in Kudremukh

TOI

By Stanley G. Pinto
The Times of India News Service

24/5/2001

MANGALORE: If one thought that modern science had explored every inch of the earth, there is surprise in store.

A new species of frog, endemic to the western ghats, has been discovered by scientists in the department of post-graduate studies and research in Environmental Science, Kuvempu University, at the Kudremukh National Park (KNP).

The frog, which belongs to the genus 'nyctibatrachus' (night frog) has been named 'nyctibatrachus hussaini', after S.A. Hussain, the famous naturalist from Dakshina Kannada, for his guidance and help in the diversity and ecological studies on amphibians of KNP.

According to Prof S V Krishnamurthy, who along with A.H. Manjunath and K.V. Gururaja of the department discovered the rare species, the find was made during the fieldwork of a research project sponsored by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) on amphibian diversity and habitat ecology on April 21 last year. He notes that some large and robust species of Nyctibatrachus were seen in a torrential stream 'Kadambi Hole', flowing amidst the KNP.

These frogs inhabit caves beneath the boulders in the riffle zone of water. He added: On careful observation following the literature describing various species of the genus Nyctibatrachus and comparison with closely-related congeneric species, it has been found that "it is a hitherto undescribed species".

Mr Hussain told *The Times of India* that the hilly terrain and forests of the western ghats were an abode for various amphibian species. He said this region harboured as many as 123 species as KNP is located in the central western ghats, which comprise highly complex vegetation mosaic of tropical evergreen forest, shola-grassland and mixed semi-evergreen forest, richly nourished by several hill streams and torrents.

Mr Krishnamurthy feels that intensive observations will certainly result in the discovery of new species and improve the understanding of the distribution of amphibian fauna.

Regarding the new species, Mr Krishnamurthy describes it in the 'Current Science' magazine of April this year as follows: 'The species description is based on four adult females and one adult male. Since collecting the specimen is prohibited in this national park, only one specimen which was dead, in the process of sampling, was deposited in the office of the Range Forest Officer (wildlife division), State Forest Department, Kudremukh.

He said the photograph of the adult male was submitted to the Natural History Museum, United Kingdom.

On its characteristics, Prof Krishnamurthy says the large torrent species of Nyctibatrachus is different from other co-generic species, by the presence of a stout body, short limbs and indistinct tympanum.

What is the significance of such a find? Hussain says it means that the habitat, at least in the area, is virgin and pure. He adds that frogs being confined to a region can be taken as accurate indicators of bio-diversity, as any change in their habitat will cause their extinction. He added that as the frogs were very active at night they were referred to as night frogs.

KIOCL: SC accepts plea against mining

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, MAY 24. The Supreme Court has issued notices to the Union and State governments and the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL), and directed the Union Government to file an affidavit giving reasons for permitting mining activity in Kudremukh National Park, which has been notified as a national park.

The notices were issued on May 10 in response to an interlocutory application filed by Wildlife First, a Bangalore- based non-government organisation working to save wildlife and protected areas.

The petition came up before a bench comprising Mr. Justice B.N.Kripal, Ms. Justice Ruma Pal, and Mr. Justice B.N.Agarwal, which has been hearing the public interest litigation, the T.N.Godavarman Thirumalpad vs Union of India, concerning the denudation and destruction of forests in the country.

The petition filed by Wildlife First's trustee, Mr. K.M.Chinnappa, through *amicus curiae* Mr. Harish Salve, seeks to draw attention to the fact that the mining lease of KIOCL, the third respondent, lapsed on July 24, 1999. As the area leased out to KIOCL formed a part of reserved forests, the KIOCL had no right to continue mining once the lease expired.

A Supreme Court order of December 12 1996 is also clear about banning any activity in forests and protected areas. Wildlife First has also contended that as the reserve forest area was declared a National Park in 1987, mining activity by KIOCL should not have continued in the wake of another interim order issued on February 14, 2000, which prohibited removal of even dead, dying or deceased trees and grasses from national parks and sanctuaries declared (such) under Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

KIOCL's continued mining operations, ignoring two orders of the Supreme Court, could be held as contempt of court, the petition has said.

The interlocutory application also challenged the two annual "temporary working permissions" in 1999 and 2000 granted by the Ministry of Environment and Forests to KIOCL under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 on the plea that there is no provision under the Act which authorises the ministry to grant such "temporary permissions".

The rainforests of Kudremukh, where several species of endangered plants exist and three major rivers — Tunga, Bhadra and Netravathi — originate, form an important lifeline for Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, making Kudremukh a high priority watershed, Wildlife First has said.

KIOCL shuts down operations

25/7/20

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, JULY 24. The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) has shut down its plant in the Western Ghats since its temporary mining permit expired today and also to plug the leak in the slurry pipeline, the KIOCL Chairman and Managing Director, S. Murari, said here.

The much anticipated response from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to the State Government's recommendation that a one-year temporary mining permit be granted to KIOCL was awaited, Mr. Murari, who had just returned from inspecting the spot where a leak in the iron ore slurry pipe was reported a week ago, said.

Mr. Murari, who was confident that the temporary permit was already in the bag, and getting confirmation was a mere formality, said the leakage was found 7 km away from Mullikar village at an elevation of 700 metres.

Mr. Murari told presspersons here that the source of the leak was a very small hole. However, incessant rain and a landslide in the aftermath had made the pipe inaccessible to attempt a rectification. However, a contractor had been engaged to do manual digging to locate the exact point of the leak. Since this was likely to take at least four weeks, KIOCL was seriously considering fetching earth moving equipment to complete the task quickly.

"The slurry poses no danger to the river and the black deposits are nothing but iron, a natural element. Its fertility is about the same as that of sand," Mr. Murari said, in an attempt to allay misgivings that KIOCL's operations had caused irreparable damage to the ecosystem.

Mr. Murari said the leakage caused a loss of 4,000 tonnes of ore worth about $ 50,000. About 15,000 tonnes of slurry is transported in 16 batches through the pipeline every month.

Mr. Murari clarified that for the moment KIOCL was only seeking a 12-month temporary mining permit for the area where it is currently operating. Under existing environmental laws, such a temporary permit can be granted no more than twice. The first one expired today.

KIOCL mining lease renewed despite protests

26/7/2000

By S.K. Ramoo

BANGALORE, JULY 25. The temporary work permit for mining granted to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL), a Union Government undertaking under the Ministry of Steel and Mines, for a year, ended on July 24 and was renewed on Tuesday for one more year.

A tremendous pressure had been exerted by environmental groups on both the State and Union governments not to renew the work permit.

According to them, the extraction of iron ore at the heart of the Western Ghats led to devastating environmental impact as it drastically affected the bio-diversity reserve of the region and endangered the unique fauna and flora, some of which were endemic to the zone. In the process, it had polluted the rivers originating from it.

The KIOCL was originally granted mining lease in 1969 for 30 years by the Karnataka Government. It ended on July 24, 1999. Subsequently, it was given a temporary work permit for a year, which expired on Monday.

The State Government, which received a request for renewal of mining lease for a further 20 years, stipulated that an environmental impact study be undertaken.

This job was entrusted to the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) of Nagpur, which presented an interim report. Its findings are awaited.

A major hurdle in obtaining renewal of mining lease by KIOCL was the notification of 500 sq. km of area, inclusive of the entire Kudremukh mining area, under the Kudremukh National Park by the State Government in 1987.

To compound the woes of KIOCL, a 67-km-long slurry pipeline to Mangalore laid through the evergreen forest developed a leakage, polluting the Yennehole river and leading to a severe ecological damage.

The leakage reinforced the contention of environmentalists that it was hazardous to mine in the Western Ghats and the work permit sought by the company should not be granted.

The Urban Research Centre of Bangalore, in a letter addressed to the Chief Minister, Mr. S. M. Krishna, urged the Government to relocate KIOCL from the Kudremukh region to Sandur area in Bellary District on the ground that the Sandur belt offers better quality of iron ore. Such a move, according to it, would protect the precious Kudremukh National Park and also the nearby Bhadra Sanctuary.

Mr. K. V. Narendra, Director of Urban Research Centre, observed that KIOCL had been mining poor quality ore, with an iron content of 38 per cent, compared to the ore with 60 per cent iron content available in the Sandur region. He pointed out that the company had been incurring an enormous expenditure for upgradation of low quality ore in the concentrator plant by utilising a large quantity of electricity and water. The heavy concentration of tailings in the Lakhya dam resulted in its getting filled prematurely about a decade ago. The height of the dam was increased by 100 feet and this led to the submersion of 300 hectares of precious shola forests.

Mining in the Kudremukh region is said to be an ecological disaster as, on an average, it receives 7,000 mm. of rainfall annually. This has led to mining wastes choking feeder streams as well as the Bhadra river. According to environmental activists, 30 years of mining by KIOCL has systematically destroyed the habitat complex of the region, endangering precious flora, fauna and rare wildlife. The water courses and rivers, which originate in the Western Ghats, are said to have been contaminated. The Kudremukh region, once known for its scenic beauty, is now dotted with ugly scars of mining. The hazardous implication of mining at the source of the Bhadra and the Tunga, is yet to be ascertained. Naturalists have been complaining of disappearance of a rich variety of fish, and the Mahaseer is now in danger. The farmers downstream have been complaining of a steep decline in agriculture productivity, owing to the heavy concentration of tailings in rivers and streams. It is alarming that the sources of drinking water of hundreds of villages are reportedly contaminated.

According to Mr. Narendra, out of 4,500 species of flowering plants, 1700 which were endemic were endangered as were a rich variety of mushroom flora. The unique wildlife species of the region, it was said, were facing extinction. The Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary, which consisted of a tiger reserve, was in proximity to the Kudremukh National Park.

Environmental groups had been arguing that economic benefits such as earning foreign exchange should not get precedence over protection of precious shola grass lands, evergreen forests and rivers. Incidentally, the Bhadra, flowing from the Kudremukh area, joined the Tunga at Bhadravathi to form the mighty Tungabhadra, which eventually merged with the Krishna in the Deccan Plateau.

According to the management, KIOCL had emerged as the largest export-oriented public sector company, earning foreign exchange worth $150 million annually. It had so far exported $1,500 million worth of iron ore. The long-term impact of environmental degradation was too heavy a price to be paid for economic benefits, the management argued.

KIOCL gets 1-year work permit

26/7/2003

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, JULY 25. Although it came a day late, the Ministry of Environment and Forests of the Union Government today communicated to the Karnataka Government that its request for grant of a one-year work permit for Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd (KIOCL) had been granted.

This means the KIOCL may continue operations in the present 1,472 hectares of broken area for 12 more months. However, it has also been asked to expedite the work on the report from the Nagpur-based National Environmental Engineering Research Institute, which has conducted the impact assessment, before the KIOCL's request for a fresh 20-year mining lease can be granted, KIOCL sources said.However, the operations in Kudremukh have been closed for some time following a leakage in the iron ore slurry pipeline a week ago, which had sent alarm bells ringing after the leakage was spotted downstream of Yennehole river that passes through 23 villages.

Operations have been closed mainly because the spot where the leak has occurred thanks to incessant rains, and a landslip that followed.The KIOCL's Director, Mr. S. Murari, now awaits a clearance from the State Government for the one-year permit, and operations are expected to resume once the leakage is plugged in a few weeks.

BUSINESS TIMES

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Kudremukh gets nod for mining, with curbs

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Kudremukh Iron Ore Company in Karnataka has got the approval to continue mining for another year in areas where it is already mining.

But the larger issue was under discussion in Delhi as Union environment minister T.R. Baalu met with members of the Federation of Indian Mineral Industries here on Wednesday. For, eight lakh hectares of the country is being mined and much of this is forest area. In the past two decades, about 46,000 hectares of forest area has been diverted for mining, and this is a tenth of the total diverted forest area.

So, it's industrial and economic gains versus adverse environmental impact. This needs careful evaluation, says Mr Baalu. And diversion of forest land should be kept to the bare minimum, he told federation members. The problems are many.

One, more forest land than required is diverted "unnecessarily" for mining, without considering the capacity to mine during the lease period. In some cases, lessees couldn't even use a fraction of the leased area in 20 years or more.

Two, not too many of the miners are complying with environmental safeguards; the status of this is "poor". If this doesn't change, warned Mr Baalu, the government may have to take "a hard view".

Three, individual proposals for clearance don't give an indication of the cumulative impact of proposed and existing activities. To check the impact of such mining clusters, a regional planning strategy is needed.

But obviously, it wasn't a complete thumbs down from the minister.

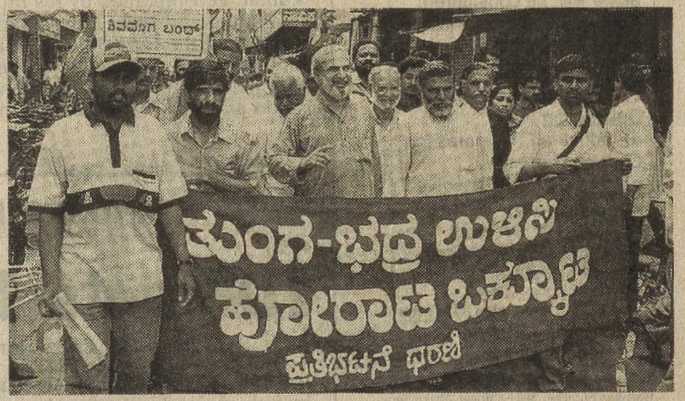
For, Mr Baalu announced that measures were being taken to cut procedural delays in clearance for mining projects on forest land.

Good response to bandh call to save W. Ghats

By Our Staff Correspondent

SHIMOGA, JULY 23. The call for a bandh on Tuesday in the villages located on the banks of the Tunga and the Bhadra in nine districts demanding a ban on mining in the Western-Ghats appears to have evoked an encouraging response if the overwhelming voluntary support being expressed to it by various organisations and institutions is an indication.

As the final phase of the support-garning exercise, a padayatra was taken out under the leadership of the Kannada writer and Jnanapith awardee, Dr.U-.R.Ananthamurthy, in various parts here on Monday. The campaign received fresh momentum after Dr.Ananthamurthy joined the agitation.



Renowned Kannada writer, Dr. U.R.Ananthamurthy (centre), leading a padayatra in Shimoga on Monday.

The padayatra commenced from the Gopi Circle and culminated at the Ramanna Shreshti Park after passing through the Nehru Road, Ameer Ahmed Circle, B.H.Road and the Gandhi Bazar. Later, at a meeting there, Dr.Ananthamurthy appealed to the people to express their support to the bandh, and prevent the rivers from being destroyed by the mining activities of Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd, (KIOCL).

Others who joined the padayatra included the convenor of the district unit of the Tunga-Bhadra Moola Ulisi Horata Samithi (which had given the call for the bandh), Mr.S.Sundara, the Shimoga District President of the Janata Dal (U), Mr.V.Raju,the General Secretary of the District Janata Dal (S), Mr.S.P.Seshadri, the poet, Mr.Satyanarayan Anathi, Mr.Sirsi Krishnamurthy, Mr.Diwakar Hegde and Prof.Rajendra Chenni, Head of the Postgraduate Department of English, Kuvempu University.

The organisations, which expressed their support to the bandh included the Shimoga District Auto Drivers' Association, the District Lorry Owners' Association, the Indian Medical Association, the Bar Association,the District Working Journalist's Association, the Sahyadri Sneha Sangh and the Kote Yuvak Sangh.

Referring to his efforts in the anti-mining campaign, he said the Chief Minister, Mr.S.M.Krishna, was convinced of the seriousness of the arguments putforth by environmentalists about the evil effects of mining.

He hoped that the peaceful protest would further strengthen Mr.Krishna's will in putting an end to mining in Western Ghats.

Protest against mining in Kudremukh to continue

By Our Staff Correspondent

SHIMOGA, JULY 25. The representatives of various groups and organisations at their meeting here on Tuesday decided to keep their movement against the mining activities in the Western Ghats alive by taking up several protest programmes untill the Government stopped the mining activities.

Disclosing this the convenor of the Tunga Bhadra Ulisi Horata Okkoota, Mr. S.Sundar, said that the final shape to the sustained movement would be given at the next meeting to be held on Monday. He said that the Okkoota, which had been spearheading the movement, would put in special efforts to intensify it in the other six districts which formed part of the Tungabhadra Basin.

Expressing his anguish over the reported extension of the mining license of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) for the next three years, Mr. Sundar said it would not be allowed to be extended further.

Earlier the demonstrators at the public meeting held as part of the bandh on Tuesday to protest against the mining activities in the Western Ghat region, took an oath to protect the two rivers of the Malnad region, Tunga and Bhadra.

Nearly 5,000 demonstrators, who participated in the protest programme, took the oath.

They demanded that the mining activities be stopped immediately in the Kudremukh hills in Chikmagalur district. They also urged the Government to initiate steps to "undo" the damage already caused to the fragile ecology of the Western Ghats by the KIOCL through its mining activities.

The "oath," which was administered by Mr. Sundar, stated that the mining activities which were inimical to the sources of Tunga and Bhadra were being opposed by the people as their survival was closely linked with them.

It said, "human beings are the last progeny created by the world of nature. The rivers, water sources, plant and animal species inherited the earth long before the humans did. Hence, the human beings do not enjoy the first right over the environment."

A memorandum urging the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M.Krishna, to ensure that the mining operations in the Western Ghats were stopped immediately, was submitted to the Deputy Commissioner, Mr. P.Ganeshan, by Dr U.R.Ananthmurthy, noted Kannada writer and Jnanpith awardee, who led the demonstration.

It said that the mining which had been going on for the last 32 years at Kudremukh had been destroying the rivers, the forests and the entire ecological system of the region. "This is the greatest tragedy of our times and it does not need reports or surveys to gauge the harm done to the environment," it added.

The memorandum said that the rivers, Tunga and Bhadra, the lifelines of the region, had been polluted and added that "the region, which ranks among the richest biodiversities in the world, is endangered with the ecological system in the region losing its balance."

The memorandum warned that if the mining was allowed to continue, the rivers would dry up and the environment would be destroyed irrevocably turning the lush green area into an arid desert.

Uncertainty over renewal of work permit to KIOCL

By S.K. Ramoo

BANGALORE, JULY 26. The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) in Karnataka, a 100 per cent export-oriented public sector unit, with a proven track record of safeguarding ecology and environment, is now on the horns of a dilemma. It is awaiting the yearly work permit from the Karnataka and Central Governments for continuing mining operations. The one-year work permit granted last year expired on Tuesday.

Environment groups, voluntary organisations and local legislators have jointly launched a strident campaign to pressure the S.M. Krishna Government not to renew the work permit to the KIOCL. In their perception, 30 years of continuous mining in the Aroli-Gangamoola Range of the Western Ghats, a bio-diversity reserve harbouring unique flora, fauna and wild species, has caused irreparable damage to the ecology. The mining region is part of the Kudremukh National Park, although the Karnataka Government denotified 3,703.55 hectares as the mining zone. The State's major rivers, Tunga, Bhadra and Nethravathy, originate in the Western Ghats. According to them, mining within the catchment area of the Bhadra reservoir has led to severe pollution.

The State Cabinet, which met last week to consider the issue of granting the work permit to the KIOCL, deferred its decision. The Chief Minister, Mr. S.M. Krishna, decided to seek clarifications from the KIOCL on the objections and apprehensions expressed by environmental groups.

Meanwhile, a large delegation headed by the Jnanpith award winner, Dr. U.R. Anantha Murthy, last week submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister urging the Government not to renew the work permit. According to the memorandum, three decades of mining in the eco-sensitive Western Ghats have had a devastating impact. It argued that environmental concerns should outweigh commercial considerations, including earning of precious foreign exchange. The KIOCL's 30-year mining lease expired on July 24, 1999. Since then, the Karnataka and Central Governments have been sanctioning work permits on a yearly basis as they have not responded to its plea for granting a long-term mining lease for 20 more years.

Environment issue

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and the Environment Management Plan (EMP) instituted by the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI), Nagpur, have given a 'clean chit' to the KIOCL on its open-cast mining. Another study conducted by the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, has also not entertained any reservations on its mining activity, but has categorically asserted that the current mining area should not be expanded to include the Neelibeedu and Gangerikal regions. The favourable findings of these two prestigious expert organisations have reinforced the KIOCL's assertion that its mining operations have not damaged the ecology and the environment.

The Karnataka Government's predicament stems from the fact it cannot be instrumental in the closure of the profit- making KIOCL. It cannot turn a blind eye to the annual earning of $ 150 million foreign exchange. It is boosting the State's revenue by payment of royalty, sales tax and entry tax to the tune of Rs. 2.5 crores annually. It also has emerged as one of the biggest customers of the Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Ltd. (KPTCL) as it is paying a mammoth power bill of Rs. 220 crores annually. The Mangalore Port is also receiving Rs. 3 crores annually by way of port charges and another Rs. 2.5 crores as land rent charges as the ore and pellets are exported through it to China, Iran, Australia, Turkey and Japan. It has entered into long-term contracts with China and other countries for the supply of ore concentrate. Any failure to honour these overseas contracts will result in violation of agreements, inviting heavy penalties. Since these are Government-to- Government agreements, the reputation of the country is at stake. During 2000-2001, it has signed fresh annual contracts with some international buyers for the supply of concentrate and pellets. It is envisaged to incur a massive investment of Rs. 650 crores in the Ninth Plan on several ongoing projects.

The Government also cannot be oblivious to the fact that 2,500 of its employees and another 10,000 dependent on it would lose their livelihood. The infrastructure created over the years by spending Rs. 3,000 crores cannot go unutilised. It has so far exported 210 million tonnes of ore concentrate and its mining zone has a stockpile of weathered ore of about 140 million tonnes and beneath it another 350 million tonnes of primary ore, enabling mining operations for another 20 years. To preserve the ecology and environment, it is executing a master plan for the preservation of existing fauna and flora, and has planted 80 lakh seedlings for providing a green cover over its degraded land. It has signed an MoU with Mangalore University for the promotion of local species on its degraded region at a cost of Rs. 50 lakhs in five years. It has signed another MoU with NEERI for evolving a bio-fertilizer for supplementing soil nutrients for nurturing natural vegetation. It has developed a unique "Sanjivini" Garden at Kudremukh for the advancement of herbal and medicinal plants and has undertaken experimental plantations.

A study of satellite imagery of the region by the National Remote Sensing Agency, Hyderabad, has revealed conservation of natural forests and a vast improvement of degraded land on account of afforestation. It has also provided valuable information relating to ecological conditions of the mining.

Include 3,703 hectares in Kudremukh Park, State urged

By Alladi Jayasri

BANGALORE, JULY 28. The Karnataka Government's attempts to give a fresh, long-term lease to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) has suffered a setback, with the Union Government saying in a submission to the Supreme Court that it should "reconsider its decision to exclude 3,703 hectares of forest land from the Kudremukh National Park".

The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has also submitted that "it is not desirable to permanently allow mining operations to continue in the Kudremukh area, and it has been decided that no approval under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, will be accorded to the KIOCL, for undertaking mining in the unbroken area".

The affidavit was filed by Mr. S.C. Sharma, Additional Director, Forests (Wildlife), in the MoEF, on Friday, before a three-judge Bench comprising Mr. Justice B.N. Kirpal, Mr. Justice Santosh Hegde, and Mr. Justice Shivraj Patil, which is hearing the interlocutory application filed by Mr. K.M. Chinnappa, trustee, Wildlife First, through senior advocate, Mr. Harish Salve.

The affidavit further seals the fate of the KIOCL, saying that the company will be allowed to operate for no more than five years. It is to be given such a period in view of its huge investments, large number of employees and dependents, and commitments made to clients.

The affidavit said: "The notification of the Kudremukh National Park (KNP) by the Karnataka Government last month excluded 3,703.55 hectares from the park. The MoEF is of the view that any forest is to be treated as a forest, as per the Supreme Court orders of 12.10.1996, which has restrained all State governments from denotifying any national park or reserved forests for any purpose, under sections 18 and 35 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972."

In this instance, the affidavit noted, the area excluded in the final notification had already been notified as reserved forests before the notification of the KNP in 1987. No rights accrued to the Government thereafter. The excluded area was deep inside the national park, and formed an integral part of the eco-system. For proper eco-management, it was desirable to include the 3,703.55 hectares in the park, and the State "is requested to reconsider its decision," the affidavit said.

The five-year breather to KIOCL comes with strings attached. The affidavit said the reprieve would be subject to conditions stipulated by the MoEF for reclamation of mined area, air and water pollution control measures adopted by the KIOCL, ensuring their strengthening of the Lakya Dam, use of indigenous species for reclamation and, additional funds for eco-restoration of the adjoining areas. The KIOCL would also have to put in place a monitoring mechanism for timely implementation of these conditions.

The affidavit made a commitment to formulate comprehensive and transparent guidelines to deal with projects of notable importance, where forests within notified areas were used.

KIOCL: Environmentalists' fear misplaced?

By K.Satyamurty

BANGALORE, JULY 31. Much of the anxiety of the environmental groups on the renewal of mining lease to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) is due to misunderstanding of some facts, according to Mr. S.Shyam Sundar, who was Principal Chief Conservator of Forests when the Kudremukh National Park was notified in 1987. He was also a non-executive member on the Board of Directors of KIOCL for three years.

The 3,203 hectares leased for mining is "reserved forest" in the sense of a legal category of Government land and not a forest of vegetation, he clarified. In the leased area, barely 10 per cent had tree growth and the rest was open grassland. The sholas or evergreens in the leased area were intact and, according to the findings of the National Remote Sensing Agency, in better condition than when the lease commenced. Mining was carried out on an elongated mound of grassland, covering 480 ha. sliced horizontally for removing the ore. Kudremukh is the face of the Western Ghat escarpment as seen from some parts of Dakshina Kannada while the KIOCL mining is several km. away on the leeward side.

Environmentalists feared that the renewal of mining lease will have a devastating effect on the Western Ghats and that the flora and fauna of the region will suffer as the leased area is prime forest land and a hot spot biodiversity, but the facts are otherwise. They also expressed anxiety that the Bhadra river will be affected if extension is granted for mining.

The KIOCL, a public sector undertaking, had done its best to contain the soil wash (erosion?) and the last 25 years of mining had proved that the damage to the Bhadra was negligible, Mr. Shyam Sundar said. The reports of two national institutes, the IISc., and the National Environment Engineering Research Institute, had substantiated that there should be no objection to continuing the lease from the point of disturbance to the flora and fauna, he pointed out.

The mining lease was first sanctioned in 1969 after being cleared by a high-level committee headed by a senior Secretary to the Union Government, Mr. P.N.Haksar, Mr. Shyam Sundar said. The working of KIOCL evolved with the developments in mining technology around the world, including environmental concerns and the company could secure environmental awards. "Much of this was when the lease agreement did not stipulate this, and there were no environmentalists on the scene," he added.

In 1987, when the intention to form the Kudremukh National Park was notified, he did not expect it to come in the way of the working of the KIOCL or at a later date, renewal of the lease, the former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests said. The notification was to primarily suspend new rights over Government land, particularly revenue land. Incidentally, at that date, some revenue land in the designated park area had good forests but this purpose of the notification had not been served. The final notification in June this year had excluded even encroached land from the national park and not one NGO or environmentalist had questioned this.

The high-level grasslands like in Kudremukh, got burnt every year due to forest fires. While in the Forest Department, Mr. Shyam Sundar found that the KIOCL was cooperative in mitigating forest fires, and later when he joined its Board of Directors, his suggestion to provide funds to the department was readily agreed to and Rs. 5 crores was given for fire-control measures. This was when the extension of lease was not an issue and even now, the company was giving Rs. 2 crores each year to support wildlife conservation efforts. No other government undertaking showed such environmental concern.

The KIOCL had on its rolls 2,500 people while another 10,000 depended indirectly on it for employment. These persons and their families could not be deprived of their livelihood and the Kudremukh township put to death, he said. Neither could one cripple the New Mangalore Port which exported over six million tonnes of KIOCL concentrate and pellets every year.

Former official's remarks on KIOCL resented

By Our Staff Correspondent

TUMKUR, AUG. 3. Environmental activists in Tumkur have taken exception to Mr. S.Shyam Sundar, former Principal Conservator of Forests, downplaying the hazardous effects of mining by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) on the Kudremukh National Park (KNP).

The chief of Greenwatchers, a representative group of environmentalists, Mr. Sanjay Gubbi, told presspersons here on Friday that Mr. Shyam Sundar had gone to the extent of describing the KIOCL as eco-friendly. He alleged that Mr. Shyam Sundar was out to wreck the public campaign against the renewal of KIOCL's mining lease out of his "love" for the company, as he was made a director of the company after his retirement. Mr. Gubbi said it was unfortunate that a senior bureaucrat had placed his personal interests above that of the State and the general public.

Mr. Gubbi said that the Kudremukh National Park had a unique habitat with a mixture of grasslands and shola forests. Tree growth was dense in valleys. During the monsoon, rainwater carried iron ore slurry from the mining area into the valley, which had a devastating effect on the shola forests, besides destroying evergreen grasslands.

Mr. Gubbi took objection to Mr. Shyam Sundar misquoting the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in support of his statement. He said the Government had entrusted a study on the impact of mining by the KIOCL on the region only when it was not satisfied with the report obtained by KIOCL from the National Environment Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) at Nagpur. The IISc had refused any help from KIOCL, and had conducted an impartial study.

Mr. Gubbi said that in October 1999, the public had openly rejected the NEERI report at a meeting held in Kalasa in Chikmagalur District. The Deputy Commissioner, Mr. K.H.Gopalakrishna Gowda, had reported the public's sentiments to the Government, and had advised the Government against extending the KIOCL mining lease.

He said that on July 27, the Supreme Court had heard a petition by environmentalists from Karnataka against the renewal of the mining lease, and it had directed the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests to "come clean before the court." Following the court's orders, the Ministry had filed an affidavit before the court on July 30 in which it had stated that the Karnataka Government would be prevented from denotifying any part of the Kudremukh National Park.

Mr. Gubbi said the Karnataka Government was now in the dock for having extended the KIOCL mining lease by one month from July 24. It was duty bound to obey the Supreme Court's orders, and produce an affidavit on the extension of mining lease and the denotification of a part of the national park.

Stating that Mr. Shyam Sundar's fears about the future of the KIOCL employees were unfounded, Mr. Gubbi said ore was a finite source, and the company was bound to be wound up, if not now, after 10 years when the ore was exhausted. The KIOCL had recently entered into an agreement with the Andhra Pradesh Government on an alternative mining site in that State. The Steel Authority of India (SAIL) had taken steps to retrench its staff through a voluntary retirement scheme (VRS). The KIOCL should follow suit.

Mr. Gubbi said the State was keen on developing its biotechnological strengths, and it would not be prudent for it to squander its biotechnological treasures. The Kuremukh National Park was an acknowledged living laboratory for practitioners of biotechnology as it had abundant wildlife, medicinal herbs, fibres and food items.

Disputing Mr. Shyam Sundar's contention that the KIOCL had, on his advice, donated Rs.5 crores for afforestation programmes, Mr. Gubbi said the company was statutorily required to deposit the amount, and it had been given to the Cashew Development Corporation. This was neither a donation nor was it paid voluntarily.

He said almost every environmental agency had found the KIOCL guilty of destroying nature, and its "show" of raising exotic plants on its premises could not be hailed as an environmental achievement. There were no records to show that the company had won any environmental awards, although Mr. Shyam Sundar claimed it had done so.

Mr. Gubbi said the Government should reconsider its policy of allowing retired government officials to accept appointments in the companies earlier "handled" by them during their tenure of public service.

Mr. Gubbi urged the Government to take action against Mr. Shyam Sundar for his alleged remarks that he would not have proposed declaring Kudremukh a national park if he had an inkling that it would come in the way of mining activity or, at a later date, renewal of the mining lease.

4/8/01

No quick decision on KIOCL: CM

By Our Special Correspondent

BANGALORE, AUG. 3. The Government has indicated to the authorities of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) that it cannot continue mining in the Kudremukh area for long, and that the time has come to look for an alternative site, the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M. Krishna, has said.

He told the Legislative Assembly on Friday that a decision on allowing the company to continue mining had to be taken after discussing the pros and cons with the Union Government, taking into account the public interest petition filed in the Supreme Court by environmentalists.

The case of the KIOCL was one in which an "instant decision" could not be taken by either the State Government or the Centre, if the economic activity of the area was not to be thrown out of gear, he said.

Apart from an investment of Rs. 6,500 crores in the company, nearly 3000 employees and 10,000 others were dependent on the company for a livelihood. The New Mangalore Port was almost totally dependent on the project, he added.

The Chief Minister, who was replying to the discussion on the supplementary estimates (first instalment) for 2001-2002, made it clear that the Government was not ignoring the environmental aspect for which it had concern. Any response should be acceptable to all. He said that the Government would not extend the area for mining for any reason.

OPEC hospital: Mr. Krishna said the Cabinet had recently decided to hand over the OPEC-aided speciality hospital in Raichur to Apollo Hospital of Hyderabad. Such a decision was taken because no specialist was willing to serve in Raichur. The hospital would start functioning soon, he added.

The Government had called for tenders for the privatisation of the hospital. One of the conditions was that 40 per cent of the patients should be provided free treatment. Raichur was not far away from Hyderabad, and it would be possible for specialists from Apollo Hospital to visit the institution and stay there once in three months for conducting check-up for patients.

Mr. Krishna said the Jayadeva Institute of Heart Diseases here, would also start functioning in the new premises by the end of this month. Equipment had been made available to the institute, he added.

Lokayukta: Referring to the suggestions of the Lokayukta to made amendments to the Karnataka Lokayukta Act, Act, Mr. Krishna said the Government was keen on curbing corruption and bringing about transparency in administration. The changes required to be incorporated in the law were being examined by the Law Department, and an appropriate decision would be taken by the Cabinet, he added.

Earlier, the Leader of the JD(U) in the Legislative Assembly, Mr. P.G.R. Sindhia, urged the Government to amend the Lokayukta Act to give more powers to the authority.

He said there was a need to check misappropriation in the departments and take stern action against officials found guilty.

Strengthening the Lokayukta would go a long way in establishing transparency in administration, he said and added that misappropriation was a cause for concern.

Mr. Sindhia said that the reports of the subject committees should be given proper attention. Top priority should be given to the management of finance in the power and irrigation departments. Resource mobilisation should be also be given importance, he added.

He criticised the functioning of the Jayadeva Institute of Cardiology, and said it should be moved to the new premises.

Special grants: Referring to the special grant of Rs. 10 crores to the Bangalore Mahanagara Palike, Mr. Krishna said the Government's policy was to extend such grants to other city corporations. However, that would be dependent on the availability of funds, he added.

Anganawadi workers: Admitting that the honorarium paid to anganawadi workers was meagre, Mr. Krishna said the limited resources prevented the Government from increasing it. He added that the matter would be considered after the finances improved.

Appropriation Bill: After the Chief Minister's reply, the House approved the supplementary estimates. The Karnataka Appropriation (No. 3) Bill, which seeks to give legal sanction to the estimates, was also approved by the House.

Participating in the discussion, Mr. Jayaprakash Hegde sought higher allocation for the Varahi Project.

Mr. M.D. Lakshminarayana (BJP) sought more funds to tackle the mite menace as there were nearly eight crore coconut palms in the State. Mr. Yogish Bhat (BJP) wanted more funds to be allocated for rain relief, as in the case of Bangalore and Bellary, to other districts.

Mr. A. Ramdas (BJP) appealed to the Government to make available special funds to ensure basic facilities in urban areas where Ashraya houses had been constructed.

Make environmentally sound decision on KIOCL, CM urged

Hindu 7/8/2001

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, AUG. 6. Three well- known people have written to the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M. Krishna, offering suggestions to "make use of a golden opportunity" to make an environmentally sound and socially responsible decision to "permanently solve the vexed problem of mining activity in Kudremukh National Park by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd."

In a missive, the author and naturalist, Mr. K.P. Poornachandra Tejasvi, the wildlife biologist, Dr. K. Ullas Karanth, and Dr. H. Sudarshan, who headed the Task Force on Health, have made four suggestions that would also "redeem the credibility of the State Government before the Supreme Court" which has directed the Government to consider afresh the final notification issued in June 2001 denotifying the area currently occupied by KIOCL.

The three have urged the Chief Minister to concur with the suggestions made by the Union Government in its affidavit to the Supreme Court that KIOCL be given a final extension for a maximum of five years to wind up its operations, and comply with all other conditions laid down by the Union Government and the Supreme Court in this regard.

The letter has suggested that the State Government immediately issue a supplementary notification for the 1,750 hectares of forest land, which was left out of the earlier notification on Kudremukh National Park, and comply with the Supreme Court's recent order which does not permit denotification of any forest land by any State Government.

The already opened-up mining area of 1,452 hectares should be included in the national park eventually, after KIOCL winds up its operations, to enable ecological restoration. The State Government should also immediately convey its categorical intention to undertake all these measures in the form of an affidavit to be filed before the Supreme Court which is hearing the matter in an interlocutory application filed by Wildlife First, they said.

"We sincerely believe that such an action on your part would be statesman-like, and win you considerable national and international acclaim, in addition to assuaging the disappointment felt by the citizens of Karnataka who had appealed to you earlier to save Kudremukh from the ravages of mining," the letter added, saying that this would further enable KIOCL to deal pragmatically with problems faced by its employees and dependents.

The letter has referred to the petition of Wildlife First challenging the decision to delete an area of 37 sq. km. from the area notified in 1987 as Kudremukh National Park. It has also pointed out that it was in response to this challenge, and in the wake of the findings of a scientific committee commissioned by the Karnataka Government, that the Government of India submitted before the Supreme Court its decision to not allow KIOCL to continue mining operations or ancillary activities in any hitherto unbroken area of Kudremukh.

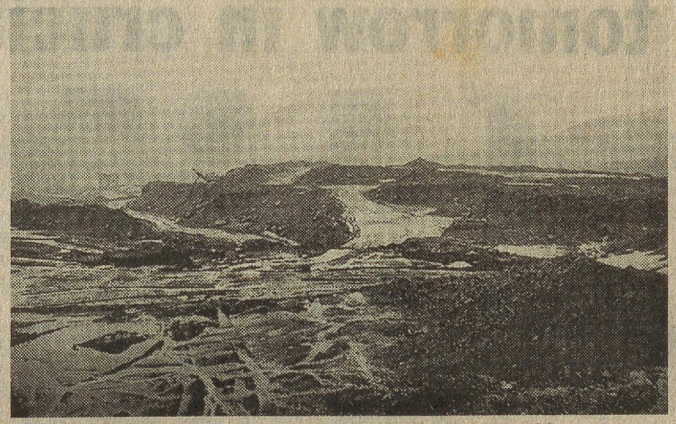
12/8/01

'Base development on equity, economy, environment'

By Our Staff Correspondent

MANGALORE, AUG. 11. For a company that has dispassionately and prominently displayed a board which reads: "Performance of one's duty should be independent of public opinion" near its administrative office, the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) is now trying to make a last- ditch effort to elicit favourable opinion to get its expired mining lease extended.

It is a quarter of a century since the public sector undertaking (PSU) began excavating iron ore in the 1452.74 hectares of land leased out to it for 30 years. The lease that earlier expired on July 24, 1999, created a feeling of uncertainty in the kith and kin of 2,500 direct employees, and another 10,000 persons (indirectly employed) by the company. By then, the KIOCL had a few adversaries in environmentalists and nature-lovers who voiced their concerns of "irreparable environmental damage" not only to the Western Ghats and its flora and fauna, where the company was mining, but also to the rivers that had their origin in the region. The Chairman of the KIOCL, Mr. S.Murari, in a press conference, spoke about the concerns of the company for the environment in and around the mining area. He said all developments should be based on the three pillars of equity, economy and environment. Mr. Murari said the apprehensions raised by environmentalists were "unfounded". The KIOCL, since its inception, had been taking more than the safeguards required to minimise the impact of mining, and it was "a company with concern from the beginning". So far, the KIOCL had spent Rs. 126 crore on anti-pollution measures, and it was spending Rs. 6.5 crore annually to maintain the environment and the ecology. "The failure of the Government to extend the mining lease will only lead to losses, both for the Government and the employees", he said adding that it was not a "wise decision" to scrap the project in the name of the environment. The area that the KIOCL was mining for the past several years still had ore reserves that could last for 25 years, and the Lakya Dam could hold the tailing slurry for the next 20 years if the current rate of production was maintained. Mr. Murari listed 11 reasons why the Government should extend the mining lease. The most important among them were the threat of closure of a well-performing, consistently excelling PSU, the loss of $ 150 million per year, the wastage of infrastructure with a replacement value of Rs. 4,000 crore and the unviability of the Rs. 325-crore joint venture KISCO.



A view of the mining area of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited.

He said apart from the "official" clearances obtained from the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, and the NEERI, Nagpur, the company itself had got done ecological studies in the Kudremukh-Aroli-Gangamoola tract of the Western Ghats, which concluded that there was little effect on the ecology. Data comparisons obtained from the ecological monitoring of the mining area by the National Remote Sensing Agency using satellites in 1973, 1988 and 1997 concluded that there was an overall increase of 2.75 sq. km. of green cover. The digital image analysis of the Bhadra Reservoir in November 1998 concluded that there was no significant siltation in the dam in the last 30 years due to mining at Kudremukh.

Mr. Murari maintained that the company had successfully implemented a master plan for the improvement of the environment, and that 80 lakh seedlings had been planted in the degraded land. The company had entered into an MoU with Mangalore University identifying local species for growth in the degraded areas at a cost of Rs. 50 lakhs. Contributions were made by the company to the Forest Department to improve forest cover in the region. He said the company would attempt full-scale reforestation in the mined area with technical assistance from Bridge-Hill Ridge-Mining Area in Australia.

BRIEFLY

Plea to renew mining lease of KIOCL

MANGALORE, AUG. 12. The Joint Action Committee of Trade Unions of Dakshina Kannada District has urged the State Government to renew the mining lease of the Kuduremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) for the next 20 years.

In a press release here today, the Convener of the committee, Mr. B.Madhava, said the committee passed a resolution in this regard at its recent meeting.

He said the extension of lease for three months indicated that the Union and State governments were giving in to the pressure of the "so-called environmentalists".

He said over 2,500 workers were employed in the KIOCL, and another 15,000 were dependent on the company for their livelihood. These workers would be put to hardship if the company was asked to stop mining in the Western Ghats.

'Launch stir against mining in Western Ghats'

SHIMOGA AUG. 12. The President of the Karnataka Rajya Raith Sangha (KRRS), Prof.M.D.Nanjundaswamy, said here on Saturday that there was a need to launch direct action against mining in the Western Ghats region by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd (KIOCL).

Participating in a satyagraha launched at the Gopi Circle here under the auspices of environmental and voluntary organisations in protest against the renewed mining activity, he said that mining should be prevented physically.

He said the Congress Government in the State was too thick skinned to listen to the pleas of the people. He wondered how a dharna being staged a 100-km. away from the project site or the capital city of the State could evoke the desired result. Several foreign companies including one from Australia had evinced interest in exploiting a part of the Western Ghats for mining. The Government was naturally interested to allow such mining.

Protest against mining at Kudremukh enters 5th day

By Our Special Correspondent

SHIMOGA, AUG. 13. The indefinite dharna by members of various organisations under the banner of the Tungabhadra Ulisi Horata Okkoota at the Gopi Circle here in protest against mining at Kudremukh by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd (KIOCL) entered the fifth day on Monday.

The members of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS-Puttannaiah faction), led by its State General Secretary, Mr. H.R.Basavarajappa, Dr. B.M.Chikkaswamy, and the State convenor of the women's wing, Ms. Pavitramma, participated in the dharna.

Mr. Mahima Patel, Janata Dal (U) leader and son of the former Chief Minister, J.H.Patel, and the District President of the Janata Dal (U) and President of the Citizens' Committee, Mr. V.Raju, also participated in the dharna.

Addressing the gathering, Mr. Patel said what was happening at Kudremukh should not be viewed as an isolated development as it was part of an international conspiracy to exploit the natural resources of the poor and the developing countries. He urged the progressive and public spirited people to come together to fight against the mining operations in the Western Ghats.

Condemning the support reportedly extended by some writers for the renewal of the mining lease for five years, Mr. Basavarajappa said they had no right to express their views on issues which involved the survival of the people of the area.

Meanwhile, the renowned Kannada writer and Jnanapith Award winner, Dr. U.R.Ananthamurthy, who is spearheading the anti-mining movement, has denied reports appearing in a section of the Press that he favoured extension of the mining lease by five years. Speaking on behalf of Dr. Ananthamurthy here on Sunday, the president of the okkoota, Mr. Kalkuli Vithal Hegde, said that he had been authorised by Dr. Ananthamurthy to deny the reports. Dr. Ananthamurthy said that such reports were spread to sully his image, he added.

Mr. Hegde claimed that Dr. Ananthamurthy had reiterated that mining by KIOCL should not continue even for a day. He said that the writer had demanded that the Government should terminate the mining forthwith and had said that any project such as the Kudremukh National Park which aimed at evicting the adivasis from the area should not be allowed. Dr. Ananthamurthy had categorically stated that he would participate in any programme against the mining activities at Kudremukh.

The secretary of the okkoota, Mr. Ashok, said that a black flag demonstration would be staged on August 15 to protest against the Government's "indifference" to the dharna.

Prof. Rajendra Chenni said the okkoota had sought the support of the people's representatives to back the anti-mining campaign.

H 19/8/01

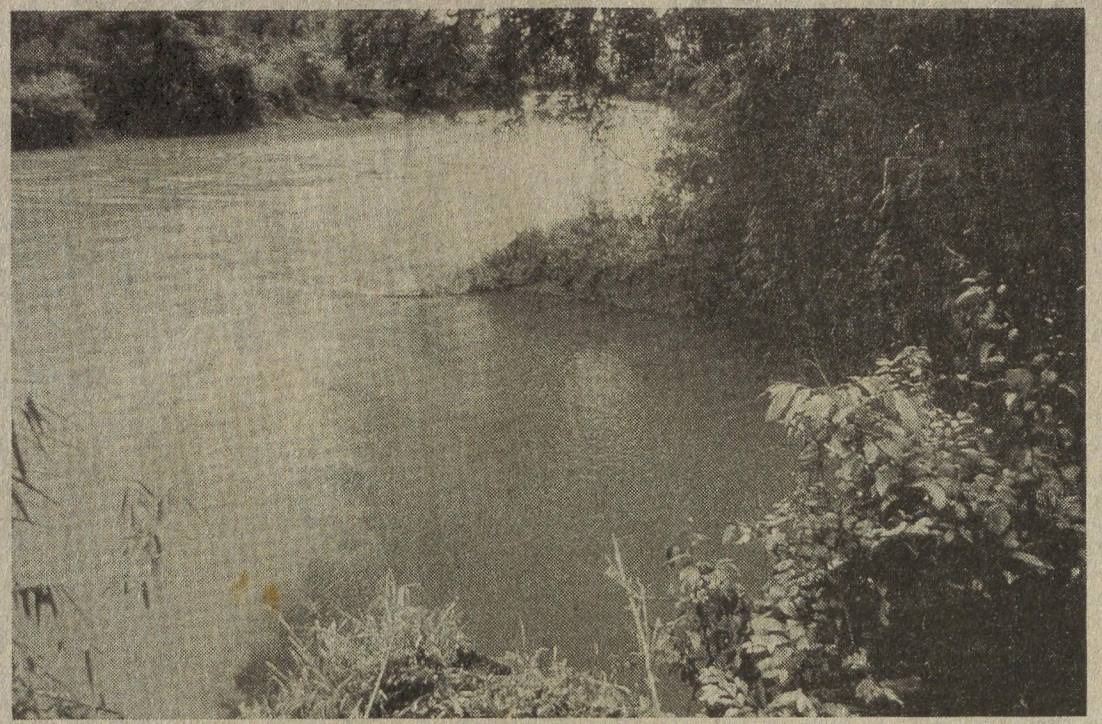
Activists intensify campaign against mining in Kudremukh

By Shivaraja B.Nanjhappa

TUMKUR, AUG. 18. Wildlife activists in Tumkur District have intensified their campaign against the mining activities of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) in the Kudremukh National Park (KNP).

They have been antagonised by the Chairman and Managing Director of the KIOCL, Mr. Murari's reported "outbursts against the anti-mining campaign" at a recent press conference in Mangalore. They have taken strong exception to the manner in which he has "twisted facts to suit the company and has tried to mislead the public" on environmental issues.

The KIOCL is one of the respondents in a suit filed by a wildlife activist, Mr.T.N.Godavarman, before the Supreme Court. The KIOCL's response is required to satisfy the apex court about the legality of the mining activity.



Water contaminated by iron ore slurry in the main course of the Bhadra.

Besides, the KIOCL is facing charges in the same court for the large-scale pollution allegedly caused by the leakage of 4,000 tonnes of iron ore slurry through a broken pipeline.

That deposits of iron ore in the park are enough to last another 20 years cannot be sufficient reason to disregard the people's movement to stop mining in the ecologically- sensitive Western Ghats. The Supreme Court's order of February 2, 2000, clearly implies that "any non-forestry activity, including mining, which alters, destroys or deprives wildlife or its habitat is prohibited".

The additional affidavit filed by the Union of India before the Supreme Court on July 26 does not dither on any part of the law governing national parks. Instead, a subtle note of caution has been sounded to Karnataka against denotifying any part of the Kudremukh National Park area.

The exclusion of 3,703.55 hectares of forest area (which includes 3,203.55 hectares leased to the KIOCL and 500 hectares of submerged area of the Lakya Dam) is considered illegal. Karnataka has been advised to rectify this.

The human settlements, including those of the Malekudiya (tribal people) are on revenue land enclosures, and they do not contravene the law. The continued stay of the tribal people, who are more or less in perfect harmony with wildlife and its habitat, cannot be an excuse to allow the "disastrous mining activity of the KIOCL".

Time and again, the KIOCL has referred to the impact assessment reports of NEERI from Nagpur and the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore and claimed that they are "favorable towards continuing mining". This is highly misleading. While the NEERI, which undertook the work at the behest of the KIOCL, has been accused of deliberately downplaying the impact of mining on nature, the IISc has vehemently opposed it. For example, the IISc report states: "Shola forest valleys have been subjected to degradation due to soil erosion, working of heavy machinery, use of explosives, hazards of landslides, tampering of underground water courses, ..." and the conclusion of the report reads: "The overall impact of the mining... on the ecology of Kudremukh National Park can be summerised mainly as the direct loss of habitat and the fragmentation of ... tracts of rain forest and grassland in the Western Ghats."

The Union Minister for Environment, Mr. T.R.Baalu, in his recent statement in the Rajya Sabha, and Mr.S.M.Krishna, Chief Minister, in his recent statement in the Assembly, have acknowledged that the IISc report is against mining in the park. Mr.Krishna has said all the pros and cons must be weighed before taking a decision on mining in the park area. However, the KIOCL has misinformed the public that the State Government is in favour of renewing the mining lease for 20 years.

As early as in 1994, the Government in its order of July 15 categorically asked to the KIOCL to find alternative mining sites away from the KNP. This was repeated in 1999 and 2000. At the time of renewing the mining lease each time, the Government absolved itself of any commitment to extend the lease further.

The contention of the KIOCL that the Bhadra waters have not been polluted by iron ore slurry and silt from the mining area is not tenable. The report of the Bhadra STAC sub-committee is clear that ..."the river Bhadra passing through the large catchment area of the KIOCL mining carries heavy silt. ...there is a sizable quantity of undesirable silt accumulation in the Bhadra reservoir due to the mining by the KIOCL."

The Bhadra, the Tunga and the Netravati take their birth in the KNP area of the Western Ghats. The Bhadra originates a little distance away from the Lakya Dam, into which the KIOCL is allowing the waste iron ore slurry and silt. The river flows eastward and reaches the plains before entering Andhra Pradesh. The polluted Bhadra waters are largely affecting the irrigated fields, according to villagers in the surrounding areas.

There is a plan to divert water from the Netravati and the Bhadra to the arid regions comprising nine districts around Tumkur. Even as the anti-mining campaign is gaining momentum among the general public in the region, wildlife activists have expressed grave concern at the attempts made by the KIOCL, its employees' unions, and certain vested interests, to "mislead the public through systematic propaganda." They have urged the public and the governments not to be misled by such "misrepresentation of facts."

To cap it all, the activists are surprised at Mr.Murari's plea that the company is not aware of the reports sent to the Government by the Deputy Commissioner, Mr.K.H.Gopalakrishne Gowda, and the Deputy Conservator of Forests, Mr.Madhu Sharma, from Chikmagalur District, advising the Government against renewing the mining lease to the company in contravention of public opinion.

Kudremukh forest dwellers harassed, say NGOs

H 21/12/01

By Our Staff Correspondent

MANGALORE, DEC.20. Even as the Forest Department has opened the doors of Kudremukh National Park for nature tourism, protests have started echoing from remote corners of the park against the department's plan to evict the tribal people from their habitat inside the national park.

The office-bearers of the Kudremukh Rashtriya Udyana Virodhi Okkuta and Tunga-Bhadra Ulisi Horata Okkuta told presspersons here on Thursday that iron ore mining should be stopped at KIOCL site and the national park tag given to the Kudremukh bio-reserve should be withdrawn.

Mr. Krishnamurthy, Okkuta Secretary, said that in the garb of protecting the national park, the department was causing miseries to the tribal people, who had been living in the area for centuries.

The department had erected gates across the paths used by the tribal people and was obstructing their movements. On the other hand, the department was allowing the multinational companies to use the same forest as their laboratories to extract genes of medicinal plants for patenting and mass production of medicines.

One of the flowering plants was said to have been subjected to bio-piracy was Rosy Periwinkle, which was endemic to the Western Ghats.

Mr. Vittal Hegde, Okkuta President, said the tribal people and tribal farmers living in the area where subjected to false cases of forest denudation while on many occasions the department destroyed trees grown by them.

At least three tribal farmers have committed suicide since 1997, "unable to bear the harassment" by department officials, he said. They were identified as Kerekatte Mahabala Moolya, Adikesu Dyave Gowda, and Haadi Shankarappa Gowda.

Mr. Hegde and Mr. Krishnamurthy feared that this was only the beginning and with the declaration of national park, atrocities against the tribal farmers would escalate.

The department was bracing itself to drive out over 5,000 families (20,000 people, 90 per cent of them were tribal people) from Kudremukh National Park area.

Quoting the Guriya Committee Report, Mr. Krishnamurthy said the panel's recommendation had become a law which gave the tribal people right to livelihood in their habitats inside the national park and considered them as part of the bio-diversity of the region.

He said by evicting the tribal people from their pastures, the department directly and the Government indirectly were committing serious offence of wiping out a link in the bio-diversity chain of the Kudremukh region.

Striking a note of discord with the "Environmentalists", Mr. Hegde said they were "attached to a string" and were serving limited purpose of saving the forests by allowing the Government to mark the national park area. But they had forgotten that preserving the bio-diversity was much more an important job.

To mark their protest, they would be holding a torchlight procession in 34 tribal villages in Shringeri, Koppa, and Mudigere taluks in Chikmagalur District, and in Karkala, and Belthangady taluks in Dakshina Kannada District on January 1. They would also hold meetings at Sringeri on Saturday and at Belthangady on Monday.

KIOCL to merge KISCO with itself

Our Bureau
BANGALORE, Dec. 19

KUDREMUKH Iron Ore Company Ltd (KIOCL), which is still battling over its claim for the renewal of 20-year permanent mining lease, has initiated steps to merge the Kudremukh Iron & Steel Company (KISCO) with itself.

KISCO was set up six years ago as a separate company to implement its proposed ductile iron spun pipe (DISP) project at Mangalore and the pig iron project. The pig iron project has been commissioned with its trail production having commenced in February this year. The DISP unit failed to reach the post due to financial constraints.

Even while grappling with the problem of funds for the venture, the company changed its mind on setting up a separate company on the advice of a consultant who suggested it would be an unviable proposition.

KIOCL has already submitted the merger proposal to the Government. The Union Steel Ministry, which has already given its in-principle consent, is taking up the issue with other administrative Ministries for a final clearance, said Mr S. Murari, Chairman and Managing Director, KIOCL.

Talking to *Business Line*, Mr Murari said that once the approval comes, the DISP and pig iron units, which had been planned to be a composite project earlier under the KISCO banner, would become a division of KIOCL. In the changed circumstances, KIOCL can implement the pig iron and DISP projects from its internal resources, which currently are to the tune of more than Rs 413 crore. KIOCL had earlier injected an equity of Rs 50 core with an additional financial assistance of Rs 40 crore pending sanction of working capital assistance from banks.

With the change in the plan, the company will take a re-look at the fresh financial needs. The composite project of pig iron and DISP is estin ated at about Rs 400 core.

While the p g iron plant is in operation with its marketing and direct sales arrangements being put in place, the 70,000-tonne per annum DISP project would be taken up for implementation after the finalisation of the international bid for turnkey collaboration. Three companies from China, Canada and Germany are in race for the turnkey contract with the selection expected to be finalised in January.

Set up research institute at Kudremukh, NGOs urge Centre

By Our Staff Correspondent

TUMKUR, SEPT. 6. Environmental organisations have urged the Union Ministry of Forests and Environment to set up a Rainforest Research Institute (RRI) at Kudremukh.

Mr. Sanjay Gubbi, chief of Greenwatchers, and Mr. S.Praveen, who heads the Youth for Nature, told presspersons here on Thursday that setting up of the RRI had been recommended by conservation experts as an eco-friendly measure.

The two environmentalists reiterated their demand that the Union and the State governments should not allow mining by Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) at Kudremukh National Park. They said the infrastructure at the mining area could be utilised to start the RRI.

They said the Kudremukh forest area was declared a reserve forest under the name "South Bhadra State Forest" in 1911, although it was named a national park later. The KIOCL was founded in 1976 and the company started mining in 1980. The forest area had been protected under the National Forest Policy since 1911. Mr. Gubbi and Mr. Praveen said that a technical study by a team of experts from the Centre for Ecological Sciences of the Indian Institute of Science (IISc.) had advised against continuation of mining in the area. The Government should have acted on the report and stopped mining in January.

They said planting of exotic tree species such as Acasia and Casurina by the KIOCL had not helped in the regeneration of greenery. On the contrary, these species had undesirable effects on the grassland and shola forests. They were hardy and resistant to climatic factors and had dominated the natural species.

They asserted that their campaign against mining was based on the findings of the IISc., and the STAC Committee, which was appointed to study the pollution caused by mining in the Bhadra Basin. The Bhadra passed through the mining region and carried silt. Crop yields had declined considerably in the downstream villages because of this. A huge quantity of silt had accumulated in the Bhadra Reservoir. Biodiversity of the region had been affected.

To a question, they said the closure of KIOCL would not affect the economic scenario in the region. The Union Ministry of Commerce had said that only 0.31 per cent of the foreign exchange revenue (FER) was contributed by the KIOCL's export business.

They said the Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Limited (KPTCL) would be happy if the KIOCL was closed. According to the 23rd annual report of the KIOCL, it owed Rs. 197 crores to the KPTCL towards arrears of power charges. The KPTCL would have realised this money if it had serviced small consumers.

KIOCL too has its supporters

By M.Raghuram

MANGALORE, SEPT. 9. Notwithstanding the demand for discontinuance of mining in the Western Ghats by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) by the groups led by Dr. U.R.Ananthamurthy, Jnan Pith Award winner, various organisations here and in others parts of Dakshina Kannada are engaged in a "Save Kudremukh company" campaign.

The KIOCL management's silence on the issue is perceived by the anti-mining groups here as an effort to bring "closed-door influence" on the Government to extend the lease term. With the involvement of trade unions, self-proclaimed industrial "gurus" and students' associations in the issue, the management's approach may not work.

The Dakshina Kannada Parisarasktara Okkuta, which is spearheading the anti-mining movement, has questioned the claim of the KIOCL in getting the lease term extended. Mr. Shampa Daithota, the President of the organisation, said the company should have already taken steps to rehabilitate its workers. The management started the KISCO with a huge investment less than two years ago. It was an act of irresponsibility and blackmail by the company, he charged.

Mr. P.R.Yashochandra, President, Parisaraskta Krishikara Vedike, said the company might be worried about its 2,500 workers losing their jobs, but along the Bhadra, about 2.5 lakh farmers were facing an uncertain future. The river was changing its course and drying up. The two organisations have organised a rally here on September 18 and in Udupi on September 23.

But the Kudremukdh Shrama Shakti Sanghatan, affiliated to the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), one of the labour groups in the KIOCL, has urged the Government to allow the KIOCL to continue mining.

Mr. Lokayya Shetty, President, HMS, has met the former Prime Minister, Mr. H.D.Deve Gowda, and apprised him of the situation arising out of the uncertainty over the renewal of the mining lease to the KIOCL. The HMS has extended support to the sanghatan in this regard.

The campaign in the interest of the KIOCL has attracted students' organisations also. The Mangalore University All-College Students' Association (there are at least three other associations of the same name), headed by Mr. Prasad Shetty, has pledged its support to pro-mining groups. The student bodies have been talked into supporting the "Save KIOCL movement" on the presumption that the youth in the district will lose employment opportunities if the company is shut down.

Both sides are writing to the authorities and leaders, including the former Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, and the Union Minister for Environment and Forests. Mr. T.R.Baalu, explaining their positions.

The Jaya Sri Krishna Parisara Premi Samithi, a new organisation, organised a "KIOCL ulisi" rally here on Sunday.



The use of explosives on hillsides has let loose soil and rocks into the Bhadra.

Forest Dept. files case against KIOCL

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, MARCH 27. The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL), already under the gimlet eyes of the Supreme Court for violation of the Wildlife Protection Act, the Forest Conservation Act and the Karnataka Forest Act even as its days of mining in the environs of the Kudremukh National Park may be numbered, has had another case filed against it by the Karnataka Forest Department.

This time, the Forest Department has filed a forest offence case (FIR No. 16/2001-2002) against the Chairman and Managing Director, and Director of Production and Planning for violation of forest laws.

Even though the company has only a "temporary working permission" to continue mining in the already broken area of 1,452 hectares, it has expanded its mining activity beyond the already broken area.

Like the proverbial Arab's camel, KIOCL has disregarded the Supreme Court directive of December 12, 1996 banning any non-forest activity in protected areas and national parks. Its latest operations have almost touched the Bhadra River, near Kachige Hole, with the use of explosives on the steep slopes of the hill and the dumping of boulders and loose soil directly into the shola forest valley of the Bhadra.

Meanwhile, an analysis of the company's financial report as on March 31, 1999 is a give away on the many ways in which KIOCL has been blithely violating a slew of laws and rules, indicating that despite the Supreme Court's many strictures, it hopes to be granted a fresh 20-year lease after the earlier one expired on July 24, 1999.

Apparently treating the fresh lease as *fait accompli*, KIOCL notes in that report, its 23rd, that despite apprehensions, it has been making every effort to secure the renewal, which, as it happened, remained elusive. KIOCL mentions in its affidavit to the Supreme Court that the total value of its assets is Rs. 1,163 crore.

As on March 31, 1999, according to the report, it was Rs. 1,041 crore. This means that assets of Rs. 122 crore have been acquired during the financial years 1999-2000 and 2000-01, after the expiry of the mining lease. State Forest Department sources wonder how a company apprehensive about its very existence in the near future could go about acquiring assets of this order.

Besides, sources pointed out, even if these investments were made outside the National Park, the Forest Conservation Act guidelines are clear on the fact that expenditure incurred on such works may prove infructuous if diversion of forest land is not approved.

Last year, the State Government's attempts to give a fresh, long-term lease to KIOCL suffered a setback, with the Government of India saying in a submission to the Supreme Court that the State Government should "reconsider its decision to exclude 3,703 hectares of forest land from the Kudremukh National Park".

...report, the Commission

Hindu 28-3-2002

PIL against NHRC probe into violence

By Our Special Correspondent

AHMEDABAD, MARCH 27. A Division Bench of the Gujarat High Court today issued notices pending admission of a public interest litigation petition challenging the jurisdiction of the National Human Rights Commission in probing the communal violence in the State.

A Division Bench comprising the Chief Justice, D.S. Sinha, and Justice B.C. Patel, issued notices to the NHRC, its chairman, and the Union and the State Governments returnable by April 8.

The PIL was filed by an Ahmedabad-based organisation, Karuna Charitable Trust, under Section 36(1) of the Protection of Human Rights Act, which prohibits a commission to probe into any matter being looked into by another judicial commission. It also questioned the NHRC seeking reports from the State Government when it was the commission's duty to give its report and seek only the Government's assistance in finalising it.

Incidentally, the managing trustee of the petitioner trust, V.Z. Patel, himself was a victim of the mob violence and succumbed to injuries, he sustained on February 28 in Shahibagh area in the city, on Tuesday.

The petitioner sought the direction of the High Court that since the State Government had already constituted the K.G. Shah judicial commission to probe all aspects of the Godhra train tragedy and the violence that followed, the NHRC or its chairman, Justice J. S. Verma, may be restrained from probing the violence. It also sought deletion and withdrawal of all the documents, reports, photographs and other materials collected by the NHRC.

The petitioner argued that it was improper and unwarranted at this stage for the NHRC chairman to publicly criticise the State Government for its alleged failure to control violence even before seeking its report. While the NHRC was within its rights to visit Gujarat to study the situation, it was unfair to accuse the State Government before finalising its report.

Meanwhile, a BJP member of the State Assembly, Vijay Patel, a lawyer, said the indictment of the State Government by the NHRC chairman tantamounted to contempt of the K. G. Shah judicial commission.

In a statement on the floor of the Assembly, Mr. Patel said the NHRC chairman had transgressed his limits by making such statements against the Government. "It is for the Government to decide its priority, whether to take steps to restore peace or engage its time to prepare reports for the NHRC".

Mr. Patel said he was not aware as to who invited the NHRC to visit the State. "May be, he (Justice Verma) had come on his own. But it was not desirable for him to hold press conferences to criticise the Government when it had already constituted the Shah Commission to probe the matter".

The "Prantiya Margdarshak Mandal" of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad yesterday had criticised the NHRC for its remarks against the State Government.

Deccan Herald 27-3-2002

Violation of Forest Act

Forest Department books case against KIOCL

DH News Service

BANGALORE, March 26

The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) has been caught on the wrong foot again with the Forest Department booking a case against it for illegally expanding and opening areas beyond its leased boundaries in the Kudremukh national park.

Forest Department sources said a FIR has been registered against the KIOCL for violating the Forest Act a couple of days ago. The mining activity has expanded almost into the River Bhadra on one of the edges near Kachige Holey by using explosives on the steep slopes of the hill. The dumping of huge boulders and loose soil has uprooted hundreds of trees in the shola forest and the accumulation of loose soil has severely clogged the natural flow of River Bhadra, the sources said.



Huge boulders and loose soil in the River Bhadra has severely clogged the natural flow of the river at Kudremukh.

However, mining has been stopped by the company personnel after the case was booked, sources said. This is not the first time that the KIOCL has been booked by the Forest Department for violations.

Presently, the KIOCL has been granted only a temporary working permission to continue mining in the already broken area of 1,452 hectares at Kudremukh.

21/4/02 REGIONAL

Mining in Kudremukh to stop in 5 yrs.

By Alladi Jayasri

BANGALORE, APRIL 20. The dog days seem to be over for the Kudremukh National Park (KNP), with the State Government now determined to stick to its commitment made in an affidavit before the Supreme Court that the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) will cease operations within the national park over the next five years.

Environmentalists and the people's movements that the issue spawned in the Western Ghats districts of Chikmagalur, Dakshina Kannada and Shimoga have often felt that this change in stand by the State Government was driven more by the compulsions of complying with the Supreme Court's directives than the desire to be seen as a protector of its wildlife resources.

Now, the environmentalists, some of whom took the issue to court, have plenty of reasons to cheer. The Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister, D.B. Chandre Gowda, who is also the minister in charge of Chikmagalur District, has made it clear that along with the mines, other kinds of human incursions inimical to the survival of national parks will have to go as well.

At a meeting with wildlife conservation groups and rural development NGOs here recently, Mr. Chandre Gowda took the stand that having told the Supreme Court that it would "roll back" its final notification on the KNP in which the it denotified 3,703.55 hectares of the park to accommodate a fresh lease for mining operations by the KIOCL. The 3,703.55 hectares of prime forest land includes 3203.55 hectares which was leased to the KIOCL, and 500 hectares of the submersion area of the Lakya Dam.

At the April 6 meeting, Mr. Chandre Gowda dashed the hopes of the "rural development lobby" among the NGOs which had banked on a denotification of areas of the KNP inhabited by tribal groups. Mr. Gowda, who had with him officials from the Forest and the Revenue departments, said the Government was committed to complying with Supreme Court directives in the matter of national parks and protected areas.

In fact, representatives of wildlife groups invited to the meeting were pleasantly surprised to hear Mr. Chandre Gowda give details of a resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) package, and make examples out of the Bhadra Tiger Reserve and Nagarahole National Park, where the R&R models have been very successful.

The highlights of the package offered to tribal people settled inside national parks are: all interior villages which are totally cut off from social amenities will be provided a voluntary resettlement package and shifted to the peripheral areas of the park where infrastructure such as roads, electricity, telephone, schools, and healthcare are already available; the Forest and Revenue departments will prepare a formal project proposal for voluntary rehabilitation of villages on the lines of the project being implemented in Bhadra; there will be no regularisation of forest encroachments other than those of pre-1978 vintage which have been identified and approved by the Union Government.

Many wildlife groups, including Wildlife First, Nature Conservation Guild of Chikmagalur, Greenwatchers of Tumkur, Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation, Arohana of Mangalore, and Wildcat- C of Chikmagalur have welcomed these decisions.

Patkar to support KGF, Kudremukh causes

Our Bureau
BANGALORE, April 20

THE Karnataka Gold Field's (KGF) People's Movement (KPM) and the Kudremukh agitation received a shot in the arm, with the Narmada Bachao Andolan activist, Ms Medha Patkar, taking up both the causes, under the umbrella of the National Alliance of People's Movement.

At a press conference here, Ms Patkar called it "a dead and dry township," and asked the State Government to hold an unbiased enquiry into the KGF-BGML issue. "Provide alternate industrialisation in the areas," she said.

She said that workers in KGF were jobless for the last 13 months, but the court had provided relief of only Rs 4,000 to each of them.

KPM plans to organise a *pada yatra* by 500 people, walking over 100 km carrying one-lakh signatures to meet the Chief Minister to present their problems. Starting on April 21, the *pada yatra* will reach Bangalore on April 25.

Among KPM demands are: The Government should create alternate employment opportunities by developing KGF as an industrial city; announce KGF as a tax-free city for the industrial sector; provide *pattas* for the houses at KGF for mining workers; declare KGF as a separate taluk; take over BGML schools; and provide basic facilities such as electricity, sanitation, drinking water supply and medical relief to the people of KGF.

As for the Kudremukh issue, Ms Patkar said that she would break the law by entering the National Reserve at Kudremukh. She said that the tribals were not permitted to enter the National Reserve although they had a right to the produce of the Reserve.

Residents, environmentalists and activists have been protesting over the mining activities of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company, which has effected the bio-diversity in the Western Ghats and polluted the fresh water stream. Western Ghats has been declared one of the ecological hotspots of the world. The State Government had denotified some 3,700 hectares in the Kudremukh National park, allowing mining.

The Supreme Court then issued notices to the State Government and the Union Government, asking the Union Government to give reasons for having permitted the mining activities. The Centre has asked the State Government to reconsider its decision to denotify the land.

G.R.N. Somashekar



Ms Medha Patkar at a press conference in Bangalore.

Medha to join campaign against park

By Our Special Correspondent

SHIMOGA, MAY 12. The campaign against the development of Kudremukh National Park in the Western Ghats has taken a new turn with the leader of the Narmada Bachao Andolana (NBA), Medha Patkar, agreeing to address a rally in Sringeri on Monday.

The Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (Puttannaiah and Nanjundaswamy groups), the Dalit Sangharsha Samiti, the Sringeri Sharada Peetha, the Adivasi Girijana Hitarakshana Samiti, the Mahila Jagruthi Vedike, the Parisara Jagruthi Vedike, the PUCL, and the Tunga Bhadra Ulisi Horata Samiti will participate in the rally to be organised by the Karnataka Vimochana Ranga (KVR). The President of the Kudremukh Rashtriya Udyan Virodhi Okkuta, Kalkuli Vithal Hegde, will preside over the function.

A final notification for the development of the park was issued on June 18, 2001. The area proposed to be developed spreads over 602 sq. km. in Chikmagalur, Dakshina Kannada, and Udupi districts, excluding 3,977 hectares of land reserved for mining by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL).

The KVR is opposing the project because it will displace 15,000 people from Goudlu and Malekudiya communities who have been living in the region for long.

The okkuta, which has been campaigning against the project for the past five years, has alleged that the Centre and the State Government have decided to implement the project not because of their concern to protect the Western Ghats, but to evict the tribal people from the area before handing it over to a multinational company for mining.

The General Secretary of the KVR, K.L. Ashok, said the Forest Department had served notice to the tribal people to vacate the land reserved for the park.

It was strange to note that the tribal people, who had been protecting the forest for the past several decades, had become "enemies" of the environment in the eyes of the Government. He alleged that the forest officials were forcing the tribal people to vacate the land by filing false cases against them. The okkuta was not opposing the programmes for the development of the Western Ghats, but was against the destruction of the region by allowing mining and other projects in the name of development.

The eco-system of the region could be protected if it was allowed to sustain on its own. The rights of tribal families over the biodiversity should be recognised, he said.

Mr. Ashok said the campaign against mining by the KIOCL and the proposed park were aimed at protecting the Western Ghats.

A seminar would be held on Tuesday at the GSB Auditorium in Sringeri.

H.S. Doreswamy, Gandhian, would inaugurate the seminar, he added.

REGIONAL

'Reasonable time' to be given to KIOCL to stop mining

By Alladi Jayasri

BANGALORE, JULY 2. The Government has decided that mining cannot go on indefinitely in Kudremukh National Park where the public sector Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) operates. "Reasonable time" will be provided to KIOCL to close down operations.

This is, perhaps, for the first time that the Government has put down in black and white its commitment to wildlife conservation and to preserve the national park, apart from its affidavit before the Supreme Court. KIOCL's 30-year lease expired in July 1999, and it has been working with a temporary permit pending decision on its plea for a fresh lease of 20 years.

It transpires that the Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation, and other wildlife conservation groups, wrote to the Congress President, Sonia Gandhi, voicing apprehensions over the attempts of several Members of Parliament from the State to pressure the Chief Minister to grant another lease to KIOCL.

When Ms. Gandhi's office passed on the missive to the Chief Minister, S.M.Krishna's office on March 16 seeking clarifications, the reply came on April 22 from the Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister stating that there was no change in the State's stand and its commitment to the Supreme Court.

The Chief Minister's office told Ms. Gandhi that "the Ministry of Environment and Forests, keeping in view the public interest litigation (petition) before the Supreme Court, as an interim measure granted working permission to KIOCL to continue mining in the already broken up area of 1,452.74 hectares for an additional period of five years from October 25, 2001." The Government has granted working permission for one year from that date.

The letter to Ms. Gandhi's Secretary, Pulok Chatterji, added: "In supersession of all earlier recommendations, the Government of India has been informed that mining should be permitted for a maximum of five years, subject to the condition that mining is confined to the broken up area. This extension will necessarily carry stringent conditions in regard to pollution control, ecological restoration, safety and strong monitoring mechanism."

Official sources told *The Hindu* that various pressure groups were lobbying to get the Krishna Government to reverse last year's final notification declaring Kudremukh forests as national park under Section 35(1) of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

The sources said the Government would be reluctant to tangle with the Supreme Court, which last year expressed displeasure over its decision to denotify 3,703.55 hectares of the national park, to facilitate the grant of a fresh lease for KIOCL.

The Government notification issued on June 16, 2001 excluded the 3,703.55 hectares of forestland from an area of 60,032.38 hectares, which will be notified as National Park under Section 35(1) of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

In its subsequent affidavit, the Government told the Supreme Court that it would abide by the Union Ministry's affidavit before the Supreme Court, and permit KIOCL to operate for a maximum of five years.

The office of Ms. Gandhi has sent a copy of the Chief Minister's response to her query to the wildlife activists.

Welcoming the development, the Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation's Coordinator, Niren Jain, has urged the Government to begin the process of phasing down the mining operations.

MPs seek review of fresh investment plans of KIOCL

Our Bureau
KOLKATA, Aug. 26

A SECTION of Members of Parliament cutting across party lines has expressed serious reservations over the proposed fresh investments by Kudremukh Inron Ore Co Ltd (KIOCL), shortlisted for disinvestment. The profit-making KIOCL has planned to make additional investments through Kudremukh Iron and Steel Co (KISCO) on new ventures for making pig iron and ductile iron (DI) pipes.

The MPs, according to sources, have also expressed doubts over the contention that there was considerable availability gap of DI pipes in the country. They have urged the Steel Ministry to review the matter, suggesting that such investments should not be allowed.

KISCO is a joint venture between Kudremukh Iron Ore Co Ltd (KIOCL), Metallurgical and Engineering Consultants (Mecon) and Metal Scrap Trading Corporation (MSTC), and operates a blast furnace with a capacity of 350 cu.m to manufacture 2,27,000 tonnes of high-grade pig iron per annum using the pellets from KIOCL's pelletisation plant.

The Finance and Steel Ministries are not fully agreed on the fresh investment plans of KISCO. While the Steel Ministry has supported the plan for investment of nearly Rs 100 crore on the proposed DI pipes unit by KISCO, the Finance Ministry, sources point out, has not fully favoured such investments.

A portion of the pig iron produced is now planned to be used for manufacturing 50,000 tonnes of DI spun pipes per annum. KISCO, citing a good market for DI pipes, has now proposed to set up a DI pipes unit ostensibly to reduce the losses being incurred on sale of pig iron at the moment.

As per information available, the Finance and Steel Ministries are also not fully agreed on the fresh investment plans of KISCO. While the Steel Ministry has supported the plan for investment of nearly Rs 100 crore on the proposed DI pipes unit by KISCO, the Finance Ministry, sources point out, has not fully favoured such investments.

KIOCL, already shortlisted for disinvestment/strategic sale of the Government's stake in the company, is the country's largest 100 per cent EOU engaged in mining and pelletisation with a capacity of 6.8 mtpa of iron ore concentrate and three mtpa of iron ore pellets. Seeking a review of the future expansion plans of KIOCL, the MPs have also sought a fresh look into the proposal to merge KISCO with KIOCL.

Sources indicate that the amalgamation of KISCO with KIOCL may allow the reserve fund of KIOCL to be utilised to prop up the loss-making KISCO. KIOCL, a blue chip PSU, has been making profits despite running into problems of extension of its mining lease on environmental considerations. It is pointed out that if KISCO is allowed to merge with the profit-making parent, this may substantially erode the profitability of KIOCL.

A faxed query by *Business Line* to Mr S. Murari, CMD of KIOCL, seeking a clarification on this issue did not evoke any response. A query on the viability of the proposed 2.5 lakh-tonne coke oven unit (estimated to cost Rs 131 crore) at Karvar, considering the high cost of imported coke, also did not fetch any response from KIOCL. The company is also planning to set up a 70,000-tonne DI pipes unit at an estimated cost of nearly Rs 150 crore.

Questions have been raised over the viability of this DI pipes venture, considering the investments that have to be made and the reported overcapacity situation (for DI pipes) in the market. Asked to comment on the overcapacity situation, Electrosteel Castings, a major player in the DI pipes sector, declined to say anything.

According to people in the know, the Union Government, as a matter of policy, generally does not permit heavy investment in a company shortlisted for disinvestment, unless the investment is required to increase its disinvestment value. KIOCL's plans for fresh investment, it is feared, may actually diminish its disinvestment value.

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KARNATAKA / SC ORDERS CLOSURE OF OPERATIONS BY 2004

End of the road for KIOCL ?

By Alladi Jayasri

BANGALORE, OCT. 24. The Supreme Court today ordered the closure of operations within the Kudremukh National Park (KNP) by July 2004. The court decision is based on the recommendations of the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) set up by it.

"After carefully considering all views and suggestions, and the rich biodiversity of the area, and the investment made by the KIOCL, the suggestion of the *Amicus Curiae*, the committee is of the view that the KIOCL be asked to wind up operations within five years, or on the exhaustion of oxidised secondary ore, whichever is earlier." The five-year term is with effect from July 25, 1999. This judicial intervention by a three-judge Bench comprising the Chief Justice of India, B.N.Kirpal, judges, Arijit Pasayat and Y.K.Sabharwal, is in response to an Interlocutory Application (IA) filed by the Bangalore-based Wildlife First and its trustee, K.M.Chinnappa.

The CEC has noted that an order of February 14, 2000, prohibiting removal of dead, dying, diseased trees, drift wood, grass, from any area declared a national park or a sanctuary, would cover mining activity in all such areas. As such, mining within the KNP by KIOCL, would be a violation of the Supreme Court orders dated December 12, 1996, as well as the February 2000 order.

"We went ahead with our petition because we believe that no development, including mining, should be allowed in national parks," Praveen Bhargav of Wildlife First told *The Hindu*.

The Supreme Court has also upheld the CEC's recommendation that the State Government should include the 37 sq. km. of reserved forest area, which had been "illegally" excluded while issuing the final notification of the KNP.

The CEC, which is now a statutory committee that will make recommendations on all matters that come under the Writ Petition 202 (the T.N.Godavarman Thirumalpad case), has made other conclusions and recommendations on the law as well as ecological and other considerations. The five members of the committee are P.V.Jayakrishnan (Chairman), N.K.Joshi, Valmik Thapar, Mahendra Vyas (members), and M.K.Jiwrajka (member secretary).

The CEC noted that after the mining lease expired in 1999, the KIOCL was granted temporary working permission twice, and the Ministry of Environment and Forests had filed an affidavit in the court, saying that another 20-year lease for the KIOCL was under consideration.

The CEC, which examined all affidavits, reports, documents, and heard all parties concerned, and also heard the *Amicus Curiae*, Harish Salve, on the matter, has noted that the Forest Conservation Act did not give room for KIOCL to seek renewal of lease. The mining leases could not be treated as a right in land for the purpose of settlement of rights under the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972.

Since the area mined by the KIOCL was part of the declared reserve forest, no new rights could accrue to the company. The CEC has observed that the Deputy Commissioner's action in allowing the claim of KIOCL under WPA, was "without jurisdiction".

Kudremukh Iron Ore Company can continue operations till 2005: SC

By J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI, OCT. 30. The Supreme Court today permitted the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company in Karnataka to continue mining operations till 2005, by which time the weathered secondary ore available in the already broken area should be exhausted.

A three-judge Bench, comprising the Chief Justice, B.N. Kirpal, Justice Y.K. Sabharwal and Justice Arijit Pasayat, made it clear that the activities would be subject to fulfilment of the recommendations of the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) on ecological and other aspects. Writing the judgment for the Bench, Mr. Justice Pasayat said the modalities to be adopted to effectuate this order and the recommendations of the CEC shall be worked out by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, the State Government and the company under the supervision, guidance and monitoring of the CEC.

The Bench was disposing of an application which, among other things, sought a direction to the Environment Ministry to withdraw permission to the company and to direct it to stop polluting the Bhadra river due to open cast mining. Expressing its anguish over the degradation of the environment, the Bench said, "By destroying nature, environment, man is committing matricide, having in a way killed Mother Earth. Technological excellence, growth of industries, economical gains have led to depletion of natural resources irreversibly. Indifference to the grave consequences, lack of concern and foresight have contributed in large measures to the alarming position."

Referring to the case on hand, the Bench said, "The alleged victim is the flora and fauna in and around Kudremukh National Park, a part of the Western Ghats, among the 18 internationally recognised 'hotspots' for bio-diversity conservation in the world." The company was earning valuable foreign exchange and discontinuance of its business activities would bring an end to this and also render jobless a large number of employees. It was also pointed out that there were some subsisting contracts and there was the possibility of extracting 342 million tonnes of primary ore and 119 of secondary weathered ore.

Therefore, while permitting the company to carry on its activities till 2005, it observed: "Hygienic environment is an integral facet of right to healthy life and it would be impossible to live with human dignity without a humane and healthy environment."

It said, "There is constitutional imperative on the Central and State Governments and bodies like municipalities not only to ensure and safeguard proper environment but also an imperative duty to take adequate measures to promote, protect and improve the environment made and natural environment." It noted that "aesthetic use and pristine glory cannot be permitted to be eroded for private, commercial or any other use unless the courts find it necessary, in good faith, for public good and in public interest to encroach upon the said resources" and that the greenery of India should not be allowed to perish and be replaced with deserts.

The Bench expressed concern that the State and Central Governments were not consistent in their approach about the period for which mining could be permitted. It noted: "Reasons have been highlighted to justify the somersault. Whatever be the justification, it was but imperative that due application of mind should have been made before taking a particular stand and not to change colour like a chameleon and that too not infrequently."

41 14.M

WB team begins probe into Nagarahole project

28/2/03

By Jeevan Chinnappa

MADIKERI, FEB. 27. The World Bank team has initiated a probe into allegations of irregularities made against those concerned with the implementation of the Rs. 39-crore eco-development project in the Nagarahole National Park (Rajiv Gandhi National Park) following the Lokayukta raids recently.

"The situation is not that alarming as it was made out to be in the Press," S.Satish, Senior Social Development Specialist of the World Bank told *The Hindu* here. However, Mr. Satish and his colleague, R.R.Mohan, did not make it clear whether there was any truth in the allegations of misappropriation of funds in carrying out the eco-development scheme. Mr. Satish even said the World Bank would extend any cooperation to the Lokayukta to get at the truth. The team, which included two private consultants, would submit a report within a month, Mr. Satish added.

Referring to the allegation involving a Mysore-based NGO, Mr. Satish said reports sought in this regard by the Forest Department had pointed out that things were in order.

To a question, Mr. Satish said on a performance scale of 10, he would allot seven marks to the progress achieved in the implementation of the eco-development project in the park. The project had created tremendous awareness among the people.

The main objectives involving as many as five components were improved protected area management, village eco-development, education and awareness and impact monitoring and research, overall project management, and preparation of future biodiversity plans. Accordingly, a management plan for the park was prepared by M.K. Appaiah, former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Karnataka.

With regard to the news of the death of 77 elephants in the park in the past three years, Mr. Satish expressed concern saying Mr. Appaiah, who is now a consultant in Forestry and Wildlife, would look into the incidents. Most of the deaths were attributed to natural causes. The report would throw more light on the deaths.

The World Bank also considered the issue of timber felling, and Mr. Appaiah too would look into this particular aspect. Mr. Satish said K.A-.Kushalappa, a former Chief Conservator of Forests, now a consultant with the eco-development project, would ascertain the facts on how to reduce the pressure on the park through village eco-development committees. Both Mr. Appaiah and Mr. Kushalappa were present.

He expressed happiness over the success of the rehabilitation project for the tribal people from Kodagu in Nagapura, near Hunsur, saying it stood out as one of the best. The relocation was taken up by an NGO with the Union Government providing funds, the Government of Karnataka land, and the World Bank giving technical assistance. He was all praise for the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore, and the Department of Anthropology, University of Mysore, for ensuring the success of the relocation scheme by providing technical inputs.

When the demand of the tribal people living inside the Kodagu forests to rehabilitate them within the forest boundaries was brought to his notice, the shortage of forest land to do so came up for debate. Anur Reddy, Conservator of Forests (Kodagu Circle), said tribal people were reluctant to move to a 324-acre land at West Nemmale in Virajpet taluk for rehabilitation. The land was recently obtained by evicting encroachers. Mr. Satish said he would talk to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests on examining relocation of tribal people at Majjigehalla, near Thithimathi, which was once leased to an orange cooperative society, but taken back.

The project was introduced in 1998 initially for a period of five years. A one-year extension was granted by the World Bank to complete the project. It would expire in June 2003. More than 30 types of studies and research activities were conducted under the project. Some of them were relocation of tribal people, census of the inhabitants, socio-economic study of the scheduled tribes, village eco-development committees, environmental education, assessment of crop and livestock, effects of fire on regeneration, soil properties etc.

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KIOCL looking at other mining options

23/5/03 By Alladi Jayasri

BANGALORE, MAY 22. Even the hard-to-please quarters in the green lobby concede one thing: if the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) did not nestle in the hills and dales of the Western Ghats, it would have been the "greenest" iron ore mining company in the country.

After a protracted legal battle, where the company likes to believe it gave its best shot, the Supreme Court has shot down requests to allow mining in the forests anymore, and the KIOCL will have to pack up and leave by December 31, 2005.

Although the KIOCL is still hopeful that it may be able to restate its case, the company has already begun looking at other mining areas: the Ramanadurga and Kumaraswamy deposits in Bellary-Hospet area, and outside the State in Jharkhand and Orissa.

"We are exploring options in other States to ensure uninterrupted supply of iron ore to keep our pelletisation plant running, the KIOCL Chairman and Managing Director, P. Ganesan, said.

The KIOCL's peculiar dilemma springs from the fact that in 1987, the Wildlife Protection Act and Forest Conservation Act were enforced, which stipulated that all national parks be cleared of human incursions. The KIOCL could continue operation only until the expiry of the lease.

The company's 30-year run that brought in foreign exchange, exploited mining resources to the optimal level, and provided employment to scores of people can no longer ensure it another 20-year lease to exploit primary ore.

There are many reasons for this.

There were ample indications of the shape of things to come when the 30-year lease expired on July 24, 1999.

New mining leases for the Nellibeedu and Gangdikallu areas, where three rivers that feed the region originate, were denied to the company.

Much before the legal battle, the KIOCL's presence in the region caused resentment within the local community which felt it had not benefited in terms of employment or economic activity.

The Tunga, the Bhadra, and the Netravathi have been considerably polluted in the past three decades, a strong active popular movement to "retrieve" the environment had taken root, and the Western Ghats was identified as one of the 18 ecological hotspots of the world.

Another major factor that went against the KIOCL in the legal battle was section 35(6) of the Wildlife Protection Act, which states that no wildlife can be destroyed or damaged or exploited within a national park, or wildlife deprived of its habitat without a permit from the Chief Wildlife Warden.

It also restrains the State Government from granting such permits until it is satisfied that such destruction is necessary to the improvement and better management of the wildlife.

A considerable part of the 4,065 hectares of mining area held by the KIOCL falls within the 500 sq. km. national park.

The KIOCL is now determined to implement in toto the eco-restoration work before vacating Kudremukh, as directed by the Supreme Court on the recommendation of the Centrally Empowered Committee.

Even then, it is a wrench for the directors, engineers, and staff, some of whom have been there from the very first year of the inception of the company.

The Director, Gurumurthy, takes pride in the herb garden, the ergonomic design of the township, the gardens, and the modern technology at work. The Deputy General Manager, Deepak Vidyarthi, whose job is to oversee the entire mining area, talks passionately about his work, but is philosophical in accepting the coming change.

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13/12/02

Samiti comes out in support of KIOCL

By Our Staff Correspondent

MANGALORE, DEC. 12. The Jaya Shreekrishna Parisara Premi Samiti, floated by the Mumbai-based industrialist, Jayakar Shetty, has once again come out in support of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL).

Addressing presspersons here today, Mr. Shetty said that the samiti had already approached political parties to elicit their support for the cause of the Rs. 40,000 crore "swadeshi" mining company and the several thousand people whose livelihood was connected directly or indirectly to the survival of the company.

Mr. Shetty said that the samithi was for the industrialisation of the region as it had the "best infrastructure and technical manpower, among other things."

In a release that was issued at the press conference, the samiti claimed that the "tussle" between the State and the Union Government on the issue had forced the Supreme Court to order the closure of the mining company by December 2004.

Mr. Shetty claimed that the rally organised by the samiti, sometime ago, had forced the National Democratic Alliance Government to reconsider the issue of extending the mining lease by another 20 years.

The samiti had also suggested the setting up of a water treatment plant at the KIOCL at a cost of Rs. 40 crore to check the pollution caused to the Bhadra.

Mr. Shetty said that the samiti would present a list of demands to the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, on his arrival here on December 21. The list would include the speeding up of the Mangalore-Bangalore gauge conversion project. The samiti would urge Mr. Fernandes to consider the setting up of a corporation, similar to the one formed for Konkan Railway so that there would be no problems for raising finance.

'Save Tunga Bhadra' rally evokes positive response

By Pramod Mellegatti

SHIMOGA, DEC. 30. A 10-day "Save Tunga and Bhadra" rally taken out by 30 environmental organisations under the aegis of the Tunga Bhadra Ulisi Horata Okkotta in Chikmagalur, Shimoga, Davanagere, Bellary, Koppal and Raichur districts to create awareness about the dangers posed to the two rivers, appears to have had a positive response.

Street plays, slide shows and group songs were part of the rally to highlight the threat to the sources of the two rivers from the Kudremukh Iron Ore Corporation Ltd. (KIOCL). The main demands of the environmentalists are that the KIOCL should be wound up and the workers rehabilitated; mining licenses should be withdrawn; and that the Kudremukh National Park should not be developed as there is a serious threat to the fragile eco-system of the Western Ghats.

Different teams that set out on their cultural mission on December 23 would converge here on January 2 when a public meeting is planned. Prominent leaders such as the President of the Bharatiya Kisan Union in Delhi, Mr. Chaudhari Mahendra Singh Tikayat, the President of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, Prof. M.D. Nanjundaswamy, and Dr. N. Murali Ballal of the Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE) will address the gathering.

What prompted the environmentalists to launch the protest programme is the reported move of the Government to renew the mining license of the KIOCL for another 20 years. It is said that the licence, which had been extended for a year after the 20-year license expired in May last year, is likely to be renewed before May 24, 2001 when the one-year extension ends.

What has upset the environmentalists is the move to allow deep mining (in the existing mines) up to a depth of 300 metres and also conducting fresh mining operations in areas in the Kudremukh National Park.

The Principal Conservator of Forests had said in a letter (October 1, 1994) addressed to the Deputy Conservator of Forests of the Kudremukh wildlife Division, that the Gangarikallu State Forest should not be subjected to mining under any circumstances.

"Prospecting for iron ore should not also be allowed in this area as it will affect the watershed of the Tunga Mandala, which is the origin of both the Tunga and Bhadra rivers. It will be detrimental to the ecology besides hurting the religious sentiments of the local people," he said.

But mining operations were allowed to continue in the Kudremukh National Park, despite objection from the Forest Department.

The convenor of the Okkoota, Mr. S.Sundar, said the consequences of allowing deep mining would be disastrous as the area has been identified as an "earthquake prone zone." The decision to allow mining operations in Nellibeedu, a new area, is equally dangerous as it would lead to serious degradation of forests and the virtual drying up of the sources of the rivers.

Call to prevent mining near Tunga, Bhadra sources

By Our Staff Correspondent

SHIMOGA, JAN. 3. The convention of the people residing near the Tunga and Bhadra and around the Tungabhadra belt here on Tuesday urged the Government in a resolution not to take up any scheme which will harm the rivers. It resolved that steps should be taken immediately to prevent mining operations by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd, (KIOCL) near the sources of the Tunga and Bhadra in the Western Ghats.

The convention adopted as many as seven resolutions which included a call to stop all industrial activities in Gangarikallu and Nellibeedu in the Kudremukh region; and the winding up of the KIOCL after providing alternative jobs to its workers.

The convention also asked the Government to drop the move to develop the Kudremukh National Park as that would involve evicting tribal people living inside the forest area, and to initiate legal action against VISL and Mysore Paper Mills in Bhadravati for polluting the Bhadra by releasing effluents into the river. It wanted similar action to be taken against Harihar Polyfibres for polluting the Tungabhadra River.

The President of the Bharatiya Kisan Union, Chaudhary Mahendrasingh Tikait, who addressed the convention, extended his full support to the fight against the pollution of the Tunga and Bhadra by industrial units such as the KIOCL, VISL and MPM. He said it was not the problem of Karnataka alone but of the entire nation. He said similar agitations by various environmental organisations were going on in Uttar Pradesh also.

He pointed out that it was necessary for everyone to think of the consequences of allowing multinational companies into the core sector of economic activity. Mr.Tikait said the Government should own up responsibility if the rivers were polluted as it was its duty to protect natural resources.

Prof.N.Murari Ballal of the Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE) said that with the advent of globalisation, privatisation, and liberalisation the divide between the haves and have nots was so vast that it was becoming difficult to bridge the gap.

He said although the decision to sign the WTO's condition's was taken by the earlier Government at the Centre, it had not yet been ratified by Parliament. The President of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, Prof.M.D.Nanjundaswamy, criticised the "anti-farmer" policies of the Government.

The Magsaysay Award winner, Mr. K.V.Subbanna, who could not attend the conference, said in a message that there was a need to launch a sustained agitation against the mining activities of the KIOCL as it posed a serious threat to the Tunga and Bhadra rivers.

Mr.Pandurang Hegde, an environmentalist from Sirsi, the president of the Tunga Bhadra Ulisi Horata Okkoota, Mr.Kalkuli Vithal Hegde, and the convenor of the okkoota, Mr.S.Sundara, addressed the gathering.

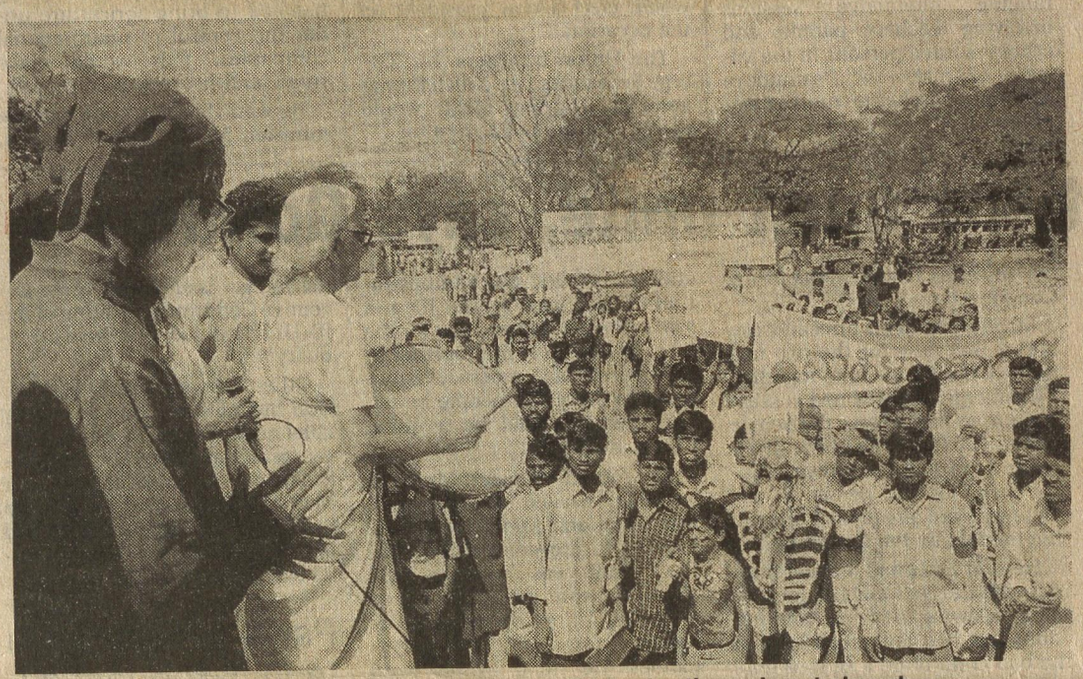
'Environment threatened by political motives'

By Our Staff Correspondent

SHIMOGA, JAN. 2. A rally here on Tuesday marked the finale of the 10-day "Save Tunga and Bhadra" jatha which was taken out in Chikmagalur, Shimoga, Davangere, Bellary, Koppal and Raichur districts. The jatha launched on December 23, was to create awareness about the threat to the Tunga and the Bhadra which are considered the lifeline of these parts of the State.

Ms. Ponnammal, a veteran socialist and freedom fighter, who formally inaugurated the rally at the Science Field by beating the drum, regretted that environment and ecology were being exposed to a serious threat on account of selfish motives of the politicians.

She cautioned that the forests would remain only on paper if serious steps were not taken to save them. She said that there was a dire need to save environment from the hold of the selfish politicians.



Ms. Ponnammal, socialist and freedom fighter, beating a drum to launch a procession taken out as part of 'Save Tunga and Bhadra' campaign in Shimoga on Tuesday.

Emphasising the need to stop mining in the vicinity of the sources of the two rivers, she said that the sources of the Tunga and the Bhadra would dry up completely if mining was not stopped immediately. She appealed to the Government not to involve multi-national companies in development activities there. Ms. Ponnammal lauded the initiative taken by voluntary organisations to fight against mining by Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) in the larger interests of saving the sources of the rivers. She hoped that the Government would take note of the seriousness of the rally and would desist from doing anything that would prove to be detrimental to the rivers. A farmers' leader, Mr. Kadidal Shamanna, was present. The colourful procession which started from the Science Field passed through the main roads of the city before converging at the venue where a public meeting was held. The President of the Bharatiya Kisan Union, Mr. Chaudhary Mahendrasingh Tikayat, addressed the gathering. The President of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, Prof. M.D.Nanjundaswamy, participated.

Volunteers of as many as 30 environmental organisations, who participated in the jatha, joined the procession. The processionists raised slogans against the proposed renewal of permission for mining in the ecologically- sensitive area of the Western Ghats. They carried placards in support of their demands.

They formed a "Human chain" at the Gopi Circle where they burnt an effigy representing multi-national companies to register their protest against the proposed move to hand over the KIOCL to a foreign company.

Students and women participated in the procession which was organised by the Tunga Bhadra Ulisi Horata Okkoota with which the Karnataka Vimochana Ranga, the Mahila Jagruthi, the Civil Rights Forum, the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha and the Progressive Vidharthi Kendra were associated. Those who led the procession included the President of the Okkoota, Mr. Kalkuli Vithal Hegde, and its Convenor, Mr. S.Sundara.

Hindu 25/5/07

'Do not renew licence of KIOCL'

By Our Staff Correspondent

SHIMOGA MAY 24. The volunteers of "Save Tunga-Bhadra Action Committee" staged a "dharna" on the premises of the Deputy Commissioner's office here on Thursday urging the Government not to renew licence of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Corporation Limited (KIOCL) to take up mining activities in the "environmentally-sensitive" area in the vicinity of the sources of Tunga and Bhadra rivers.

Submitting a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner, they demanded that the mining activities be banned completely in Western Ghat region.

NEERI study says KIOCL poses no threat to environment, ecology

By Our Special Correspondent

BANGALORE, JUNE 6. The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) in a press note on Wednesday stated that a recently-conducted study undertaken on the directive of the State Government, by the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI), Nagpur, had indicated that there was no serious impact on environment and ecology in the Kudremukh forest area thanks to the safety measures adopted by the company. Towards this end, the KIOCL had, with the help of Mangalore University, developed and planted local species of plants (acclimatised to the Western Ghats) by way of afforestation works in the abandoned mine area.

After recently obtaining the ISO 14001 certification from DNV, Netherlands for its environment management system, the KIOCL was now committed to preserving and protecting the environment. It had won a number of environmental awards, the most recent being the Greentech Environmental Award, instituted by the Greentech Foundation in Delhi.

A comprehensive master plan was being implemented to deal with the integrated development of forestry and ecology to prevent pollution, and maintain and improve environmental development. These included afforestation, prevention of soil wash from mining operations getting into aquifers, steps against noise, water and air pollution, preservation of flora and fauna and hormonology, development of infrastructure facilities, abandoned land use, etc. The company accorded the highest importance to monitoring the water and air quality in coordination with the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board, the College of Fisheries, and the Research Centre of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute in Mangalore.

Despite loss of production for 63 days in the financial year 2000-2001 owing to the damage to its slurry pipeline, the company succeeded in fulfilling its financial targets for the year. Despite difficulties faced by the steel and iron ore industry, the company consistently earned foreign exchange of $ 150 million per annum. Its performance was rated as "excellent" by the Department of Public Enterprises. In the last financial year, the KIOCL achieved a sales turnover of Rs. 583 crore, and earned a net profit of Rs. 59 crore. Consequently, the KIOCL Board approved a dividend of Rs. 22.12 crore to be paid to its shareholders.

The KIOCL was committed to the responsibility of developing its neighbourhood, which was reflected in the development of playgrounds for schoolchildren, construction of school buildings, provision of drinking water to Kalasa, Samse and Balehonnur villages, programmes for healthcare, building of bridges across rivers, etc.

The company had struck a fine balance between ecology and development, and remained committed to the protection and preservation of the environment, the press note added.

KIOCL: Minister thanks State

By Our Special Correspondent

BANGALORE, JUNE 22. The Union Minister of State for Steel, Mr. Braj Kishore Tripathi, has thanked Karnataka for extending the lease to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company by 20 years.

In a letter to the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M. Krishna, Mr. Tripathi has said that the exclusion of 3,703 hectares of forest land in the South Bhadra State forest (Kudremukh National Park) would pave the way for grant of a fresh lease.

Pejawar seer opposes move on Kudremukh

By Our Staff Correspondent

UDUPI, JUNE 22. Sri Vishwesha Theertha Swamiji of Paryaya Sri Pejawar Math has criticised the Government's move to the denotify over 3,000 hectares of land in Kudremukh National Park, paving the way for a 20-year lease to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL).

In his letter of June 20 to the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M.Krishna, the swamiji has said he had learnt that the "State Government is going to denotify parts of Kudremukh National Park for continuation of mining for another 20 years, and to build a new dam for the collection of iron-ore waste."

This would spell doom for the Bhadra river and the people living downstream. Iron ore was available in plenty in the region and mining could be shifted to a low rainfall area, where the damage to environment would be minimum.

This would safeguard the interests of the KIOCL employees. "We urge you to take measures in this regard," he has said in the letter.

HINDU 22-6-2001

Greens protest denotification of KIOCL mining area

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, JUNE 21. Wildlife activists and environmentalists have expressed shock over the Kudremukh National Park notification which excludes from the limits of the park the 3,703.55 hectares leased out to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd.

The Nagarik Seva Trust and the Institute for Natural Resources Conservation, Education, Research and Training (INCERT) today came out with a detailed report titled "Escalating Ecocide in Kudremukh National Park" documenting the many omissions and commissions by the KIOCL and the State Government, disregarding several laws and Supreme Court directives.

Over 800 documents were collected, numerous field trips made by as many as 20 organisations supporting NST and INCERT, before the report was completed. Mr. Zafar Futehally, well-known wildlife expert who released the report, said it was depressing to see India, an eager signatory to all international treaties and conventions related to conservation of wildlife and ecology, destroying its own precious, irretrievable wealth of natural resources in this manner.

Quoting from the reports of IUCN, a conservation organisation, he said the eco-footprint, an indicator of the impact of human interference on Nature, showed that the negative impact on the environment had gone up by 50 per cent in 50 years.

Mr. S. Sridhar of INCERT noted that according to the Asian Environment Report, 90 per cent of wildlife habitats on the continent had been completely destroyed in the past 50 years.

The report on KIOCL's "ecocide" notes that the mining company has been violating provisions of various Acts, including the Forest Conservation Act, 1980; the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972; the Environment Protection Act, 1986; the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1978; the Explosives Act, 1972; and the Karnataka Irrigation Act, 1964.

The violations by the company include failing to pay water rates consistently over several years on the pretext that it is paying cess to the Karnataka Pollution Control Board, a poor track record in compensatory afforestation, and pollution of the Bhadra and the Bhadra Reservoir.

Wildlife groups such as the Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation have issued statements saying that they fear the notification would lead to continued mining in the fragile Western Ghats, leading to further pollution of the Bhadra, and silting up of the reservoir.

"By issuing the notification to denotify the mining area under lease to KIOCL, whose lease expired two years ago, the State Government has violated the directives of the Supreme Court on refraining from denotifying any area within the 526 parks and sanctuaries in the country," the release added.

Wildlife First, Nature Conservation Guild of Chikmagalur, Wildlife Watch of Bangalore, Greenwatchers, Tumkur and Arohana of Mangalore have joined the Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation in an appeal to the Government to immediately withdraw the notification, and ensure that Kudremukh is retained as a national park.

Greens oppose move to renew KIOCL's mining licence

By Pramod Mellegatti 12/7/2001 Hindu

SHIMOGA, JULY 11. Environmental organisations have opposed the reported move of the Government to renew the lease given to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) to continue mining in the Western Ghats. The present lease will expire on July 24.

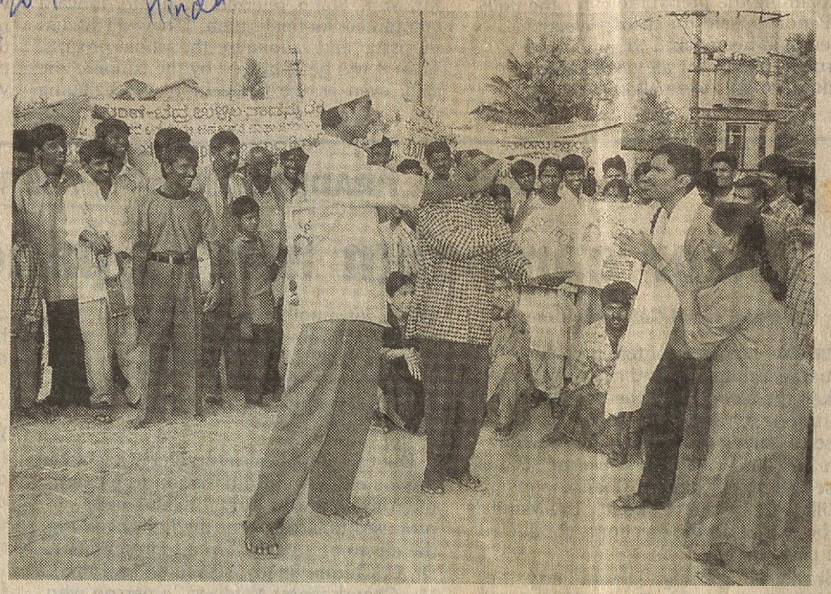
The ongoing agitation by the Save Tungabhadra Action Committee, against mining in the region by KIOCL, took a new turn with the participation of the Kannada writer and Jnanpith Award winner, Dr. U.R.Ananthmurthy, who hails from the Malnad region.

He has been campaigning against the threat posed to the Tunga because of mining in the Western Ghats. He has participated in many protest programmes held at Tirthahalli in Shimoga District.

The environmentalists argue that any move to renew the lease given to KIOCL will cause irreparable damage to the Western Ghats.

Mr. Kalkuli Vithal Hegde, who has been spearheading the movement against mining in the region, said mining operations in the past 30 years had ruined the Bhadra, and the Tunga too would meet the same fate if the lease was extended to KIOCL. These rivers were the lifeline of Karnataka, and nobody had the right to pose a threat to them in the name of development, he added.

He alleged that the idea behind renewing the mining licence was to privatise KIOCL before handing it over to Nippon, a Japanese company, to which iron ore was being supplied.



A street play as part of the demonstration to protest against the mining operations of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited.

The 30- year licence should have expired in 1999, but the Government renewed it twice. The Government intended to renew the licence for the next 20 years. Most of the mountain ranges in the Western Ghats had been razed to the ground in the name of mining. Despite causing damage to the fragile ecosystem of the region, KIOCL was being honoured with the environmental award every year, he charged.

Mr. Hegde opposed to the development of a national park in the region. The intention behind it was to allow the KIOCL to continue mining after evicting nearly 20,000 tribal people who had been living there, he said.

Prof. B.M.Kumaraswamy, environmentalist, said mining was going on in the Western Ghats in violation of the Supreme Court order of December 12, 1996 which banned non-forest activity in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. It was surprising that the Government itself had violated the order by allowing mining in the area which was part of the Kudremukh National Park, he added.

He said the southern part of the Western Ghats running from the Kali downwards was one of the two biodiversity hotspots in the country. The manner in which mining operations were carried out indicated that a systematic attempt was being made to destroy the priceless flora and fauna in the region. The 67-km.- long pipeline from Kudremukh to Mangalore carrying the iron ore slurry passed through the national park.

Prof. Kumaraswamy took exception to the reported action of the State Government to denotify 3,700 hectares for mining without seeking the formal approval of the Assembly.

Meanwhile, the Tungabhadra Ulisi Horata Samiti Okkoota has called for a bandh on July 24 in all districts where the Tunga and Bhadra flow to protest against the reported move of the Government to extend the mining lease to the KIOCL.

'Save Tunga' stir gets a shot in the arm

SHIMOGA, JULY 15. The on-going "Save Tunga" agitation received a boost with the leading writer from the Malnad region, Mr. K.P.Poornachandra Tejaswi, son of the poet laureate, K.V.Puttappa, expressing his support to the movement.

Recently, the Jnanpith award winner, Dr. U.R.Ananthamurthy, who also hails from the Malnad region, associated himself with the agitation calling for suspension of mining near Kudremukh.

In a letter to the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M.Krishna, Mr. Tejaswi said he was making a request to him after reading his reply to Dr. Ananthamurthy's e-mail to him (Mr. Krishna) on the mining activities near Kudremukh.

Mr. Tejaswi said he was greatly impressed by the sincerity expressed by him (Mr. Krishna) in his reply to Dr. Ananthamurthy. "I am unable to join Dr. Ananthamurthy in meeting you on July 18 but I am extending my wholehearted support to Dr. Ananthamurthy in his struggle," he said.

Explaining his close association with the enchanting environs of the Western Ghats region, Mr. Tejaswi said: "I have spent several years of my life on the banks of the Tunga and the Bhadra and also on the slopes of the Kudremukh and other hills. I have seen and studied the frightening environmental disasters of mining at those places."

Mr. Tejaswi said the stopping of mining was only the first step of the long march towards minimising the environmental hazards in the future.

Meanwhile, a meeting of the legislators from the Malnad region has been convened at the Vidhana Soudha in Bangalore on July 17 to discuss the situation arising out of the continued mining operations by the KIOCL in the Western Ghats and to impress upon the Government not to renew the mining licence.

It is learnt that Dr. Ananthamurthy has convened a meeting of prominent citizens of Bangalore on Monday to seek their support to the agitation against the mining activities in the Malnad region and also to request them to pressure on the Chief Minister not to renew the mining licence of the KIOCL.

Govt. statement today on mining in W. Ghats

18/7/2001

By Our Special Correspondent

BANGALORE, JULY 17. The State Government will make a statement tomorrow on the renewal of the mining lease issued to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL), which has kicked up a controversy, the Minister for Mines and Geology, Mr. V. Muniyappa, has said.

Mr. Muniyappa informed the Legislative Assembly on Monday that he had asked the officials to prepare a detailed report on the mining operations at Kudremukh since the issue involved both the State and Union governments.

The minister was responding to concerns expressed by the Opposition over the "destruction of the Western Ghats" due to the mining of iron ore in the area. The matter was raised by the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Jagadish Shettar, during Zero Hour. Mr. Shettar said the reported permission granted for the renewal of the company's mining lease would lead to the destruction of the Western Ghats. Mr. A. Ramdas (BJP) said the water used to wash the ore mined in the area would pollute the Bhadra. The forest wealth destroyed by the mining operations could never be regenerated.

Mr. K.B. Mallikarjun (JD-U) said the Bhadra and Tunga would dry up unless KIOCL was asked to stop mining.

Mr. Visvesvara Hegde (BJP) referred to the views of environment experts that the Western Ghats was one of the 18 "biodiversity hotspots" worldwide which had to be preserved. While making it clear that those opposed to the mining operations were not against development, he said the question that should be asked was, development at what cost?

Hindu 16/7/02

HMS opposes anti-KIOCL stir

By Our Staff Correspondent

BANGALORE, JULY 15. The Kudremukh Shram Shakthi Sanghatan affiliated to the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) has opposed the anti- iron ore mining in the Western ghats campaign by environmentalists and intellectuals.

Reacting to the reports of the agitation against the leasing of new areas for mining to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL), Mr. Lokayya Shetty, president of the sanghatan, in a press release here today said the agitators should stop instigating people against the project by feeding wrong information to them. They should see for themselves the environmental programme that the KIOCL had taken up on its sites.

H

18/7/01

'Talks on Kudremukh will not yield much'

By Our Staff Correspondent

SHIMOGA, JULY 17. The President of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS), Prof. M.D.Nanjundaswamy, has not approved the "meek" request made by some intellectuals to the Government to stop mining operations by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) in the Western Ghats.

"Why should we go to the Vidhana Soudha to make such a request to the Government only to show our weakness?" he asked. His reaction came when he was asked at a press conference here on Tuesday about the sudden spurt in the anti-mining activities under the leadership of the Kannada writer and winner of the Jnanpith Award, Dr U.R.Ananthmurthy.

Hegde favours ban on mining

H 18/7/90

By Our Special Correspondent

BANGALORE, JULY 17. The former Chief Minister, Mr. Ramakrishna Hegde (in picture), has expressed support for the demand for banning all mining activity in the Western Ghats of the State, including that at Kudremukh.



In a statement to the press here on Tuesday, Mr. Hegde said that he fully supported the writers, conservationists and prominent citizens of the State who met here on Monday under the auspices of "Rujuvaathu Vedike" and gave a call for halting mining activity in the Western Ghats.

Mr. Hegde said that he could not attend the meeting as he had two other appointments.

Any commercial activity leading to the "defiling" of the Western Ghats would have serious repercussions on the entire South India, he added.

Mr. Hegde issued a call on his own to the people of the State to support the writers and others who were determined to stop mining in the ghats.

Decision on KIOCL mining lease today

By Our Special Correspondent

BANGALORE, JULY 18. The Chief Minister, Mr. S.M. Krishna, on Wednesday assured a delegation led by the Jnanpith Award winner, Dr. U.R. Ananthamurthy, which called on him, that the Cabinet, which was scheduled to meet on Thursday, would take a final decision on the issue of renewing the mining lease of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL), which would expire on July 24.

He assured the delegation of environmentalists, legislators and others that the Government would have to take various factors into consideration before it decided to renew the mining lease. He said that the Union Government had a big stake in the issue, and that the Supreme Court's intervention was also expected. He told Dr. Ananthamurthy and other members of the delegation that the State Government did not entertain the request earlier made by the KIOCL management for expansion of the mining operations in the Kudremukh region.

Dr. Ananthamurthy and others forcefully pleaded with the Chief Minister not to renew the mining lease, as 30 years of continuous mining operations in the eco-sensitive Kudremukh region in the Western Ghats, which was rich in rare fauna and flora, had denuded the forest and caused immense damage to the eco-system of the region. The delegation impressed on the Chief Minister that a "momentous and historic decision" not to renewing the mining lease, resisting pressure from any quarters, would effectively arrest the havoc already wrought on the region.

The members of delegation included the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council, Mr. K.H. Srinivasa, Mr. B.L. Shankar, Mr. K.B. Mallikarjun, Mr. A. Jnanendra and Mr. Visvesvara Hegde. The former State Government official, Mr. Yellappa Reddy, and the noted environmentalist, Mr. Ullas Karanth, were also part of the delegation.

Speaking in the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Krishna said on Wednesday that a decision on whether or not to permit KIOCL to continue mining would be taken by the Government, in the light of the experience so far.

Mr. Krishna, who was replying to points raised by the Opposition members expressing concern at the destruction of flora and fauna in the Kudremukh area, said the Cabinet had rejected the company's request for the allotment of more land for mining.

Pointing out that mining was permitted by the Government about 30 years ago in the background of the need for industrialisation of the State, Mr. Krishna said the time had come to assess the damage to the Western Ghats. Even in the past, persons with a concern for the environment had warned against mining on the ground that it would affect not only the particular area, but the entire Western Ghats, he added.

Intellectuals cry halt to mining in Western Ghats

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, JULY 16. The prestigious Rijuvathu Vedike, actively supported by a galaxy of senior citizens, acclaimed Kannada writers, noted environmentalists, politicians, and former bureaucrats, has urged the Government not to permit the "suicidal" mining activity in the entire Western Ghats in the larger interest of protecting the rich flora and fauna.

Addressing a press conference here today, the former Chief Justice of the High Court of Mysore, Mr. Justice Nittoor Srinivasa Rao, said that destroying nature indiscriminately in the name of development would harm the national interest. It was time the authorities concerned realised the danger posed by mining in Kudremukh and took steps to prevent imminent tragedy.

Emphasising that the agitation against the Government's reported willingness to permit mining in Kudremukh, the Jnanpith Award winner, Dr. U.R. Ananthamurthy, said that the situation was alarming and should command immediate attention. He regretted that he had not given much attention to the issue although agitation against such devastating activities, had been going on for the past 10 years. Terming the agitation as an expression of "righteous indignation through peaceful measures," he said he had told the activists of the Save Tunga-Bhadra Agitators' Federation that the movement should be wholly peaceful and non-violent and not even a protest slogan should be raised either against the Government, MNCs or others involved. It should be an apolitical movement, and there was no place for political or personal interests and differences in it.

Explaining his position and the action that he had initiated in this regard, he said the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M. Krishna, had responded to his e-mail and agreed to meet a delegation on Wednesday. If the State Government was genuinely keen on resolving the issue and help people and their culture, it could even overlook the Union Government's interest if there was any. The federation would chalk out its future course of action after holding discussion with the Chief Minister, he added.

The noted environmentalist, Mr. Ullas Karanth, suggested that the State Government could help people and itself by withdrawing the affidavit from the Supreme Court (filed by it) on the issue in connection with a pending case. He charged that the Union Ministry of Steel and an influential politician were keen on extending permission to mining in Kudremukh.

A number of environmental activists, representing various fora from Shimoga, Thirthahalli, Chickkamagalur, Kudremukh and other areas said that even officially-sponsored survey reports on the issue were false and misleading. There was a classic case of a survey report classifying cows under wildlife and interpreting grass as forest, they added.

The former Secretary, Department of Ecology and Environment, Mr. Yellappa Reddy, said that the Kudremukh issue was not confined to one place or one State. It was an issue to be perceived on a broader perspective. It had all the calamitous potential to become a national issue if it was not addressed immediately.

A 12-minute video documentary on the adverse impact of mining in Kudremukh on the theme "Insane mining: Continuous tragedy of Kudremukh" was screened on the occasion. Prof. A.N. Murthy Rao, Dr. M. Chidananda Murthy, Dr. Sumatindra Nadig, Dr. Chandrashekhara Kambara, Mr. A.N. Nagaraj, Prof. Murari Ballal, the former Chief Conservator of Forests, Mr. Parameshwarappa, the former Chairman of the Kannada Development Authority, Mr. G. Narayana, and Ms. Indira Arunachala, spoke. The Minister of Information and Publicity Prof. B. K. Chandrashekar, Mr. Nada Gouda (MLC) and a number of intellectuals, writers and environmental activists and academicians were present.

The issue is scheduled to be discussed again by a number of MLAs, MLCs and other politicians under the aegis of the Rijuvatu Vedike on Tuesday.

Govt. may withdraw mining lease to KIOCL

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, JULY 19. Environmentalists fighting to preserve what is left of Kudremukh, after 30 years of iron ore mining, might have something to cheer for: the Government's decision not to extend mining lease given to Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd.

Interestingly, the same person who granted the lease, as Minister for Industry 30 years ago, is now expected to take the decision to terminate it. Addressing a meeting of the national executive committee of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry here on Thursday, the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M.Krishna, said: "The Government might have to withdraw the lease given to KIOCL."

"We have seen the degradation of environment. Now certainly, we have to make amends. The amends must be met squarely," he said.

Mr. Krishna, who recalled that "even then, my elders had warned me" of the damage that would be caused by the mining, however, could not resist throwing an element of doubt on what the decision was likely to be. "There must be a delicate balance; we cannot simply throw out the investments made there," he said.

Rally against mining

24/7/01

BHADRAVATI, JULY 21. A rally has been planned on July 24 by the Tunga-Bhadra Save Struggle Federation in protest against the mining in the Western Ghats by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL).

Thirty-nine organisations will participate in the rally demanding that the Government preserve the environment and stop all mining activities in the region.

Protest against mining lease gathers momentum

By Our Staff Correspondent H 22/07/01

SHIMOGA, JULY 21. The agitation against the Government's move to renew the mining licence to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) in the Western Ghats is gaining momentum. Various organisations and institutions have expressed their support to the call for a bandh on July 24 in nine districts through which the Tunga and Bhadra rivers flow.

Stating this at a press conference on Friday at the Karnataka Sangha here, the co-ordinator of the Tunga Moola Ulisi Horata Samithi, Mr.Kalkuli Vithal Hegde, said that the Chief Minister, Mr.S.M.Krishna's statement that a decision to extend KIOCL's mining lease would be taken after discussing the issue with its employees, gave the impression that he was under pressure from vested interests to do so.

Although Mr.Krishna had admitted to the delegation led by the Kannada writer, Dr.U-.R.Ananthamurthy on July 18 in Bangalore that the continued mining in the Western Ghats in the last 30 years had caused incalculable damage to the eco-system, his subsequent statement was confusing.

Mr.Hegde said all the experts who had conducted a detailed study on the impact of mining in the Western Ghats felt unanimously that it was harmful and it should be stopped.

He said the bandh on July 24, which would coincide with the expiry of the mining lease, would be total and peaceful.He warned that the agitation would be intensified if the Government ignored the opposition to the mining activity. The seers of the Sringeri, Pejawar and Rambhapuri maths had expressed their support to the bandh.

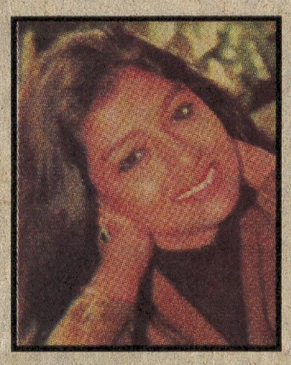
Mr.B.L.Sridhar an environmentalist from Tirthahalli, referred to the remark of the Chief Minister that the closure of mining operations would render the KIOCL employees jobless, and said the employees the company could be offered adequate compensation before allowing them to opt for voluntary retirement. The interests of the lifeline rivers and the Western Ghats and the people who depended on these rivers for their sustenance, could not be sacrificed for the sake 2,000 employees.

The secretary of the committee, Mr.K.L.Ashok, said that mining would not be permitted after July 24 under any circumstances.

Mr.S.Sundara said human chains would be formed during the bandh on the banks of the Tunga and Bhadra in all the districts where it would be observed as a mark of protest against the mining activity.

MORNING NEWS

MAY 30, 1999



■ MOVIELINE

BENGALI DEBUT
NANDITA DAS

page 11



■ MAHABHARATA

A GIANT STEP
TOWARDS JAYADHRATA

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■ CRAFT

WOOD CARVING
SKILL AND AESTHETICS

page 12

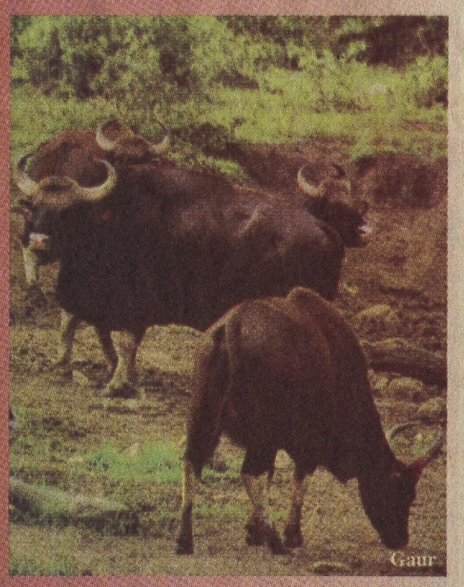
Sunday Morning

Animal Diversity of Kudremukh National Park


Tiger


Leopard


Loris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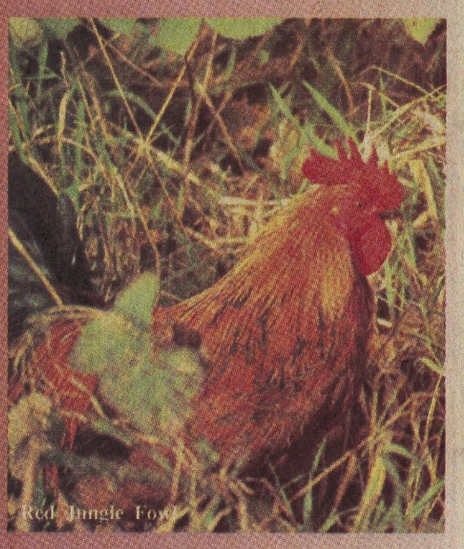

Red Jungle Fowl

The Kudremukh National Park is under increasing pressure from mining activities. Further an extension of mining lease and a prospecting licence to KIOCL is posing a serious threat to the biodiversity of the region. Dr K Prabhakar Achar appeals for urgent measures to deal with the crisis

The Western Ghats, which extend from the mouth of the river Tapti (21N, Gujarath) to the tip of the peninsular India (8N, Cape Comorin), practically form an unbroken barrier along the western coast for almost 1600 km, being interrupted only by the Palghat gap of about 30 km wide. They are considered as one of the 18 biodiversity hotspots in the world. Kudremukh National Park straddling across the districts of Chickmagalur, Dakshina Kannada and Udupi, is one of the Karnataka's most recently declared, protected areas, located almost in the heart of the hill chains of Western Ghats.

History and Geography

Kudremukh National Park corresponds to the erstwhile state forest declared by the government of his highness, the Maharaja of Mysore in 7th July 1916. On 2nd September 1987, the government of Karnataka declared an area of 60,032.384 hectares (about 600 sq.km) as KNP from its earlier status of reserved forest. Once it was a popular hunting spot for the rich coffee planters of Dakshina Kannada, Chikmagalur districts and the neighbouring Kerala state.

KNP stretches between Narasimha Parvatha (in Sringeri Taluk) in the north to the Jamalabad Fort (in Belthangadi Taluk) in the south. The average elevation of the hill chains sprawling within the park area is about 1000m and the highest peak is Kudremukh peak (1892m). The park area has rich deposits of magnatite and hematite.

Innumerable streams and rivulets cascade down to form spectacular waterfalls and these rivulets, after traversing through undulating plains, form three main rivers of the region-the Tunga, the Bhadra and the Netravati. 'Gangamoola' is said to be the place of origin of these three important rivers (but, in the survey of India toposheet only the river Bhadra is shown to be originating in Gangamoola), and harbours a sacred grove of shola type evergreen forest. A forest corridor connects the park to Someshwar wildlife sanctuary in the north-west.

Ecological Habitats

KNP presents a mosaic of vegetation that includes the tropical evergreen forests at the steep slopes and southern hilltops and semievergreen forests towards the west coast. The tropical evergreen forests along the central ridge are extremely diverse and well preserved, while the vegetation of higher slopes and rolling hills comprises of the typical low elevation shola and grassland. Each patch of shola forest appears like an island surrounded by grasslands.

Scrubs, thickets and grasslands are the major non-forest habitat types. Monoculture plantations of eucalyptus, casuarina and *Acacia* appear in a number of locations. The horticultural crops include arecanut, coconut, coffee, cashewnut and rubber plantations. The annual herbaceous cultivations include cereals like paddy and pulses.

Plant Diversity

In many well studied landscapes of Western Ghats, over 1000 species of flowering plants have been recorded.Some of them are endemic and many are of great medicinal value. The commercially exploited non-timber forest produces and minor forest produces of the park area mainly include sheegekai *(Acacia Concinna)*, *gugul (Ailanthus malabricus)*, vatethuli *(Artocarpus lokoocha)*, dalchini *(Cinnamomum verum)* nellikai *(Emblica officianlis)*, manthpuli/muruganahuli *(Garcinia cambogia)*, bheerundi *(Garcinia indica)*, jarigehuli *(Garcinia xanthochymus)*, jayeekai *(Myristica gragrans)*, rampatre *(Myristica malabarica)*, alalekai *(Terminalia chebula)*, betta *(Calamus sp)* and vate *(Ochalandra sp)*.

Animal Diversity

The park area is also well known for its rich diversity of animal life. These include, the majestic Indian gaur, sambar, spotted deer, tiger, leopard, wilddogs, sloth bears, slender loris, common mangoose, giant squirrels, bonnet monkeys, common langur and endangered species of lion-tailed macaque and malabar civet. Birds that enthrall nature lovers include hornbills, imperial pigeon, emerald dove and malabar trogon. The deadly king-cobra, the rare leanboo turtle and the flying dragon are the important native species of reptiles. Besides, there are several species of amphibians, freshwater fishes, butterflies and other forest insects.

Habitation sites and Population

According to the directory of national parks and sanctuaries in Karnataka, prepared by the research team of Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi, there are 98 village and 126 permanent habitation sites within the park. The Kudremukh township itself has over 4000 residents. Population of the park area mainly consists of tribal and other forest-dwelling communities.

Threats to the Park

The construction of roads for mining activities and transport is causing considerable damage to the forests and wildlife. When trees are removed, wildlife populations are fragmented and the poaching becomes easier using vehicles.

Loss of natural habitat and the subsequent decline in biodiversity are major issues of concern, especially considering the rare and endangered species that the park harbours. Birds like the great Indian hornbill and mammals like the lion-tailed macaques have very specialised food and habitat requirements. If their habitats are destroyed, the fauna would also be endangered. Another highly endangered species, the small Indian civet (*Viverricula indica*) is also found in the area. Habitation areas in the lowland evergreen forests are being damaged due to encroachment and improper management of forest resources. Uncontrolled extractions, of forest produce farming and plantations and cattle grazing and poaching are some of the other activities which are posing threats to the park.

Prospecting Licence and Extension of Mining Lease

The government of Karnataka accorded sanction for the issue of prospecting licence of KIOCL for an area of 310 ha, at Nellibeedu deposit within the Kudremukh National Park, on July 15, 1994, for a period of three years, after obtaining the approval from the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF), Government of India, without consulting either the Chief Wildlife Warden or the Chairman of the Wildlife Advisory Board, as required under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. After obtaining the prospecting licence, the KIOCL swung into action and started destroying the very rare and precious shola forests and the wildlife habitats of the threatened species, even though a foot-track was all that was needed for prospecting. Meanwhile, the KIOCL also applied for a mining lease within the park area, especially the Nellibeedu and Gangadikal deposits. Protests from well known environmentalists and local communities opposing the illegal mining and expansion of mining activities carried out by KIOCL were ignored! At this stage, several environmentalists, along with many public spirited persons made a representation on August 9, 1997 to the Secretary, MOEF. Mr A K Verma, then Chief Wildlife Warden of the forest department, admitted that KIOCL had indeed violated the prospecting licence and further stated that KIOCL had not fulfilled their monetary commitments to the forest department, and had paid only Rs 1.2 lakhs as against the stipulated Rs 5 crores. The managing director of KIOCL, however, is said to have stated the following in his Annual Report of the Company:

"As for the exploitation of the nearby Nellibeedu deposits, the company has already completed the prospecting work and looks forward to securing the mining lease in the near future. Prospecting licence for the Gangadikal deposits too has been taken up for consideration of the government of Karnataka and government of India. When these two licences are in possession, the future of your company as a mining organisation would be secure atleast for the next two decades or more."

(Contd on page 10)


Photo: Dr K P Achar

Kudremukh National Park
Green bordered with GLOOM

The establishment of Kudremukh township, Malleshwar, and Kudremukh Iron ore company Limited (KIOCL) in 1970s, and the completion of 110 km New Mangalore-Kudremukh highway during 1976-77, exposed the entire park area to visitors and tourists. The KIOCL complex is a source of major disturbance in the park, especially due to the blasting, mining and waste dumping activities. In addition to a 4,605 ha enclosure (consisting of a township, mines and a processing plant), KIOCL has an adjacent smaller enclosure at Lakhya, with an 855 metre long, 90 metre high earth-filled dam and a reservoir to hold iron ore tailings. Pollution of streams around the KIOCL premises as well as the adjoing areas of the Lakhya dam reservoir has been reported. Disposal of mine tailings into local streams and downstream Bhadra river, especially during the monsoon, is potentially dangerous to fish and aquatic ecosystems.

Life on Earth



June 5th, every year, is celebrated as World Environment Day

Pollution from toxic chemicals threatens life on this planet. Every ocean and every continent, from the tropics to the once-pristine polar regions, is contaminated. Ecosystems and wildlife everywhere - seals, whales, alligators, panthers, migratory birds and many other species - have been seriously affected, and there is growing evidence of harm to humans as well. WWF(World Wide Fund for Nature) recognizes that controlling pollution is important to conserving biodiversity. Efforts to increase scientific understanding of toxic chemicals and to restrict or ban harmful chemicals stems from evidence of their ability to undermine the basic functions of entire ecosystems, as well as their impact on wildlife and human health.

Recognizing the far-reaching effects of pollution to wildlife throughout the world, WWF continues to investigate toxic chemicals and their relationship to biodiversity, seek alternatives to harmful synthetic agents, and educate the public and policymakers to the dangers of toxics.

In the last 50 years, since the end of World War II, the manufacture and use of toxic chemicals has increased dramatically. Many of the synthetic substances that pervade our environment are highly toxic. Toxic chemicals have been found worldwide in both animal and human tissue. Pesticides have caused death and serious illness, especially among agricultural workers in the South.

The loss of biodiversity caused by toxic chemicals in the environment is a loss to humankind. But we also know, through work on endocrine disrupting chemicals and persistent organic pollutants (POPs), that humankind itself is also at risk.

WWF's goal is to stop, and reverse, the accelerating degradation of the environment, and to help build a future in which humankind lives in harmony with nature. Toward that end, the overall goal of WWF's Global Toxics Initiative (GTI) is to end the production, release and use of chemicals that are endocrine disruptors, bioaccumulative or persistent within one generation - by no later than 2020.

GTI is an integrated program, working in concert with other WWF programs, including Forests, Fisheries, and Climate Change, under the larger umbrella of the Global Threats initiative. Global Threats addresses the way human beings, as producers and consumers, use natural resources. Uncontrolled trade in timber is reducing lush forests to acres of smoldering stumps. Indiscriminate fishing methods have caused catastrophic worldwide declines in fish stocks. Fossil fuel use is changing the global climate in ways that undermine entire ecosystems. Synthetic industrial and agricultural chemicals, from PCBs and plastics to DDT, are contaminating the Earth.

As a counterattack to these global threats, WWF is: Researching the underlying causes of these threats; Building public awareness and mobilizing consumer action; Promoting markets. In certifying sustainably produced timber and fish; and Advocating international and national policy changes. Understanding the undeniable links between the various Global Threats programs, each is able to utilize the strengths, expertise and resources of the others. Similarly, Global Threats programs, including Toxics, co-exist and cooperate with other projects, such as Endangered Species and Endangered Spaces-the Global 200, as a part of WWF's Living Planet Campaign. ■

SW sunday WATCH

☐Anti-clot drug helps ulcerative colitis

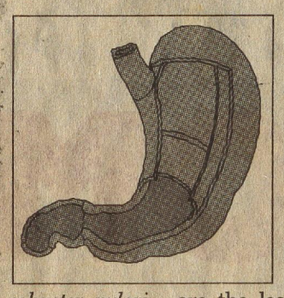
The 'blood-thinning' drug heparin — usually used in patients at risk for clots — can also reduce the symptoms of ulcerative colitis in some patients, according to researchers. Because gastrointestinal bleeding can be a complication of ulcerative colitis, researchers had assumed that anticoagulant drugs like heparin would be of little benefit to such patients. However, anecdotal evidence began to suggest that colitis symptoms might improve in some patients coincidentally treated with heparin for other illnesses.

A recent study has "found a modest benefit of heparin in improving symptoms of ulcerative colitis," said lead author Dr. Joshua Korzenik of Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, Missouri. Korzenik said the mechanisms behind the effectiveness of heparin in ulcerative colitis are "more intriguing than even (these) results."

But he theorized that ulcerative colitis "is in a certain way like a heart attack to the colon." Tiny 'micro-clots' within the local blood supply may reduce oxygen supply to the colon, he said, impairing its ability to heal. Heparin may clear these micro-clots, "helping reverse... these problems and re-establishing good blood flow," resulting in faster healing.

The researchers also note that their study shows that the use of heparin "is safe in the setting of moderate to severe ulcerative colitis." But more study is needed to confirm these study results before heparin becomes a recognized treatment for ulcerative colitis.

☐The ulcer villains



Most people do not know that stomach ulcers are caused by bacteria, and are largely curable through a combination of antibiotics and acid-reducing medication.

What's more, people who are most likely to be infected with ulcer-causing bacteria - *Helicobacter pylori* - are the least likely to be aware of the ulcer-bacteria link. Only one in four people with a history of ulcers knew that bacteria might be the cause of their illness, according to a survey of more than 5,400 people.

This lack of awareness may prompt people to try to treat their symptoms with over-the-counter antacids, rather than by consulting a physician. Of those surveyed, 43 per cent said they had used an over-the-counter antacid in the last month before the survey. Many of these people were using the drugs for more than 14 days a month.

43 per cent of those participants taking anti-acid medications had not seen a doctor for their symptoms. And 26% of patients who were self-medicating with an over-the-counter antacid medication reported a history of peptic ulcer disease.

This is of concern because these patients may have had a history of ulcer in the past, and they have not seen their doctor to get the cure, which is *H. pylori* therapy for eradication.

The Centre for Disease Control, together with academic institutions, the federal government, and industry have now launched an educational campaign to raise awareness about the association between *H. pylori* infection and peptic ulcer disease.

☐Changing trends in cancer

Major changes are taking place in cancer incidence around the world, with increases in breast, prostate, colorectal and lung cancer, largely due to lifestyle factors. The increase in lung cancer associated with the increased usage of tobacco products worldwide represents the most important transition.

At the same time, cancer of the stomach, cervix and liver is declining due to better treatment and prevention of infection. This is best illustrated by lung cancer becoming the leading fatal cancer worldwide in the early 1980s. Tobacco-related cancers are believed to predominate in cancer occurrences well into the next century.

The good news is declining incidence rates for three cancers caused in part by infection, including stomach, cervical, and liver cancer. Stomach cancer can be caused by *Helicobacter pylori* bacteria, cervical cancer can result from infection with the sexually transmitted human papillomavirus, and liver cancer is associated with hepatitis B infection. The declining rates are due to more widespread treatment and preventive screening.

Developing countries have begun to adopt a "Western" lifestyle, and are thus experiencing a rise in the breast, prostate and colorectal cancers that are associated with such a lifestyle. However, the increase in tobacco use is of greatest importance. In the year 2000, there will be an estimated 8 million deaths from cancer. ■

Green bordered.....

(Contd from page 9)

In June 1998, the KIOCL applied for an extension of its present mining lease, which expires in July 1999. In this regard, the Minister of State for Steel and Mines stated in the parliament on July 24, 1998 that no decision had been taken yet on the application.

Displacement

Agitations against feared displacement, demands for denotification, harassment in the rights settlement procedure are the sequence of events that were predicted by the local inhabitants and the social activists when the court ordered settlement of rights within one year in all the protected areas, including Kudremukh National Park.

The fact that many of these habitats are also home to, or the resource catchments of, tribal and other forest dwelling communities, adds to the sense of alarm. Local communities inside the Kudremukh National Park are opposing what they fear is a move by the Forest Department to displace them from the park area. In fact, they have justifiably stressed that they are the one who have protected and helped to regenerate the forests in the area in the past.

Since the declaration of the KNP was made on 2nd September 1987, it seems quite reasonable to consider the demands of the local communities that the extension period of regularisation of encroachments within the park area from the present 1978 to 1988. The encroachments made after 1988 may be taken up for displacement and resettlement with due compensation. Meanwhile, adequate steps must be taken to prevent any future encroachments under the joint protected area management.



A watwerfall

Photos: Dr K P Achar

Sarpagandha

It is quite unfortunate that the forest officials failed to attend a meeting in March 1999, called by the former Chief Minister of Karnataka, Sri M. Veerappa Moily, to find out an amicable solution to the problems confronting the displacement of tribals and other forest-dwelling communities of the National Park.

Joint Protected Area Management

Significantly, in an independent letter to the Conservator of Forests, Wildlife North Circle Shimoga, the DCF, Wildlife Division, Dandeli, has suggested that the resettlement of people from the Anshi National Park area is not a good idea. According to him, many of the management activities within the protected area involving labour are carried out by the local people, and their cooperation is needed to provide social fencing which will protect the Anshi National Park. Any attempt to resettlement of the inhabitants will only further antagonize the already agitating people and will be a very futile and counter productive step. He has suggested that instead, their settlements should become 'enclosures', phycially located inside the boundaries of the park, but legally excluding it.

A Proposal for Consideration

If the DCF of Kudremukh Wildlife Division, Karkala, also writes a similar letter to the Conservator of Forests, Wildlife North Circle, Shimoga, pertaining to the resettlement issue confronting the Kudremukh National Park, it will go a long way in the conservation of forests and the wildlife of KNP.

Also, on the positive side, a meeting of forest officials, NGOs, independent wildlifers and social activists should be held to discuss the future wildlife conservation in Karnataka. The meeting should be marked by frank and open discussions, and its recommendations bring hope that a more participatory and effective mode of conservation is going to emerge.

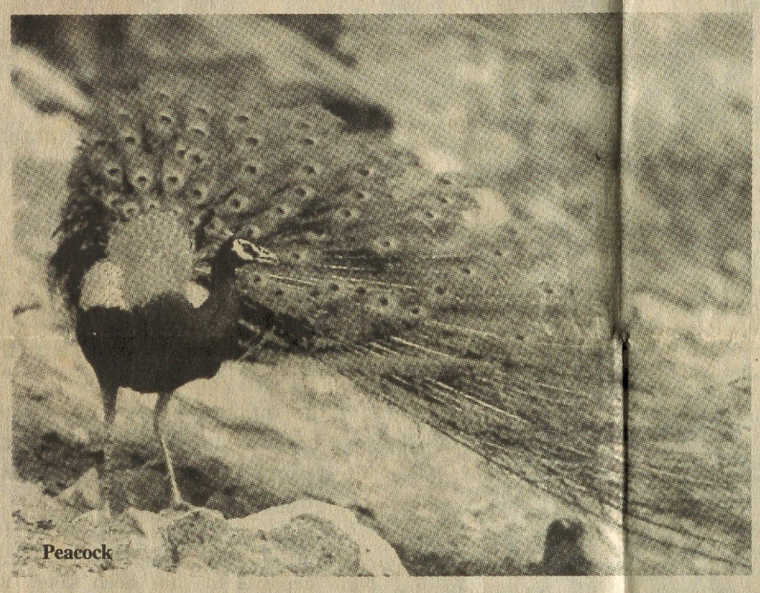
Nagarika Seva Trust (R), Guruvayanakere, a voluntary organisation committed for environment conservation, rural development, sustainable farming, health and medical services and issue-based networking, will be willing to participate in such an endeavour. ■



Wild Dogs



Langur



Peacock

Poets' Corner

Four mini poems

Some people
have heard
of the cuckoo's
melody.
Yet, they aren't
familiar with it
physically.
Because they know
the crow better
as they are
experts in
the last rites.

There should be
a deep sea
for a shark.
But, for a prawn
the sandshore
is sufficient.

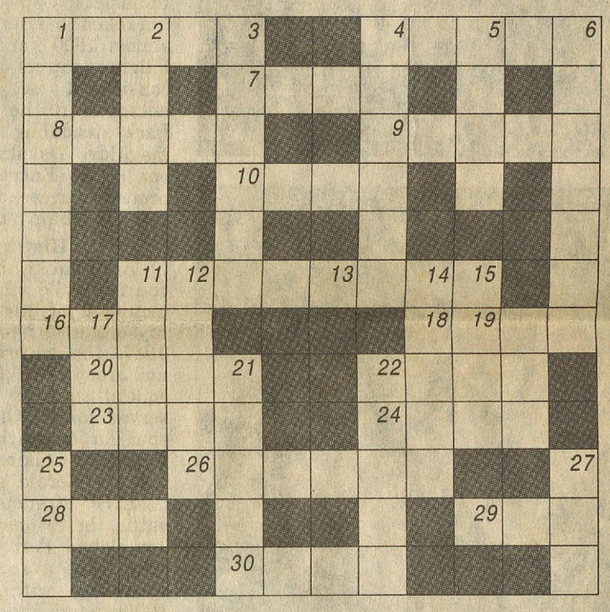
The riot is over
So also massacre
gangrape
and bloodshed.
Now its the time
for the police
to appear
before the aggrieved
and concede gifts
and pose like
the Gods
of our Puranas!

Some poets
have described
the sea
as Ratnakara.
But it is
the smugglers who
turn it so.

■ Dr R K Manipal

Morning News Crossword

by K V Laxmidhar



Clues

Across

1 Without you and one of the three Rs our Lord will be in distress (5)
4 Propel (5)
7 To help to beat some innocent person is bad indeed (4)
8 Planted in the slit of another stock (5)
9 It takes a long time to convince and take together persons of different ideologies (5)
10 Object of devotion (4)
11,13 An ace actor performs a number of roles in single shout (4,4)
16 One always wishes this one to rest in peace(4)
18 Dissatisfied followers revolt against the sire (4)
20 Very light blow (4)
22 Without this vision life is dull to most of us (4)
23 Small wingless agile insect (4)
24 Small island (4)
26 Semi-divine maidens (6)
28 Space for keeping chickens (3)
29 R in Greek alphabet (3)
30 At all times (4)

Down

1 Hottest period of summer (3,4)
2 Neal was not at all fat (4)
3 Fixed daily allowance of food (6)
4 Sloping type (6)
5 Collective stakes in games (4)
6 Receipient of a legacy (7)
11 heat wine with sugar and species (4)
12 Different in nature (5)
14 Disheveled lock of hair may create stress (5)
15 Slab of wood at the foot of a door(4)
17 Away (3)
19 diocese of a bishop (3)
21 Recipient of payment (5)
22 Criminal Rathi was an inmate of this famous hall in Delhi (5)
25 Does this organisation intended for the welfare of children make them weep? (3)
27 Decay from want of use (3)

Answers

Across : 1 DOLOR 4 IMPEL 7 ABET 8 GRAFT 9 ALONG 10 IDOL 11,13 MANY ACTS 16 SOUL 18 RISE 20 FLIP 22 TELE 23 FLEA 24 ISLE 26 NYMPHS 28 RUN 29 RHO 30 EVER

Down : 1 DOGDAYS 2 LEAN 3 RATION 4 ITALIC 5 POOL 6 LEGATEE 11 MULL 12 ALIEN 14 TRESS 15 SILL 17 OFF 19 SEE 21 PAYEE 22 TIHAR 25 CRY 27 ROT

Shaila

CHALAM - ROY

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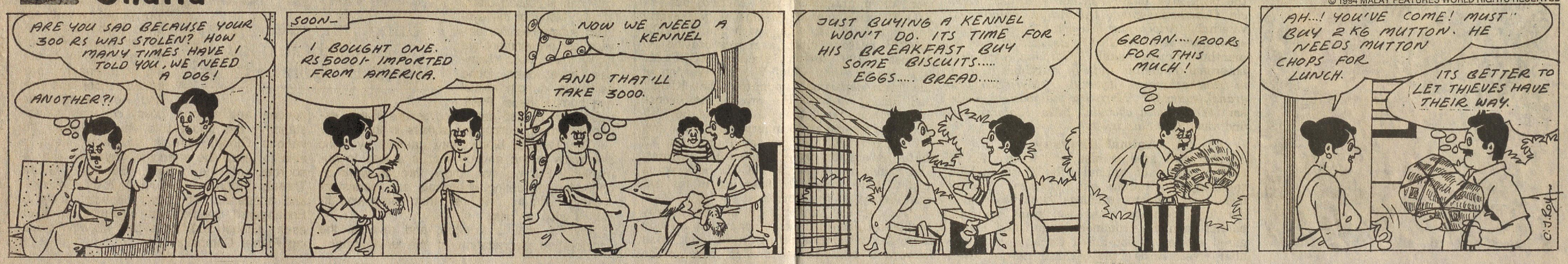




BINAYAK DAS/CSE

DEEP CONCERNS

Environmental groups wage legal war to contain mining operations in Karnataka's Kudremukh National Park

BINAYAK DAS KUDREMUKH (KARNATAKA)

Destruction often comes disguised as development. Nobody knows this better than the inhabitants of Kudremukh National Park (KNP) in Karnataka, who have witnessed years of mindless mining and the consequent loss of habitat in the state's 'protected' area. But now, the locals with the support of wildlife groups are seeking to arrest the trend by waging a relentless legal battle against Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) — the public sector undertaking responsible for extensive damage to the ecosystem. The large-scale resistance follows the mining company's refusal to relinquish its hold despite the expiry of its initial lease in 1999 amidst a prior notification declaring Kudremukh as a national park with a total area of 60032.40 hectares (ha).

With KIOCL now asking for an extension of lease for the next 20 years and demanding inclusion of fresh land around Gangamoola area for mining, prominent environmental groups like Karkala-based Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation, Bangalore-based Wildlife First!, Wildlife Conservation Society and Environment Support Group along with Belthangady-based Nagarika Seva Trust and Parisarasaktara Okkuta have taken the contentious issue to the Supreme Court. Last year Delhi-based Legal Action for Wildlife and Environment (LAW-E), and K M Chinappa, trustee of Bangalore based Wildlife First! filed an application in the Supreme Court contending that mining in the protected area was illegal.

Following this, the Court issued notices to the Union and state governments and KIOCL to file an affidavit as to why mining was being allowed inside a national park. This forced the state government in June 2001, to issue a final notification of the park covering 53,600 ha area, thus protecting Gangdikal and Nellibeedu region from mining. The move was hailed as a great victory by most wildlife non-governmental organisations (NGOs) but also came in for condemnation as in the same notification, 3,700 ha of forest land was excluded from the national park to facilitate continuation of mining by KIOCL in the already broken area of Kudremukh. Though the legal fight is far from over as the Apex Court is yet to pronounce its final judgement, the intense activism and powerful public opinion has rendered KIOCL's chances for getting a lease renewal bleak. Hopeful of a positive outcome, conservation scientist Ullas Karanth says "There were no wild life or forest laws earlier and this region went by default to the mines; but now we have laws and we should not allow the mistake to continue."

Tracing the history

Nestling in the lap of the fragile Western Ghats — world's famed bio-diversity hotspot, Kudremukh was declared a reserve forest area as early as in 1913-14 by the erstwhile Mysore government. With geological studies by National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) revealing a wealth of iron ore

Rehabilitation riddle

Just below the Kurdemukh mines flows the Bhadra, and on the opposite side of the river is the house of Gulabi. "We once owned that land," says Gulabi pointing towards the mined area, little realising that history may repeat itself in case rehabilitation becomes a reality. But there are others who are aware of the impending threat and strictly oppose the upcoming rehabilitation scheme that will dislodge them from within the park. Ironically these are same people who had been moved earlier when the KIOCL took their land for the mines. The protracted battle between the mining authorities and environmentalist groups has today left many villagers confused about their future.

M A Brahmadevaiya of Nellibeedu voices their concern when he says: "Earlier, ours was a revenue village but now they say it is a forest village". Some villagers, like those belonging to the rehabilitated Jamley village, in fact support KIOCL operations saying that it provides them their daily bread and butter. "We have been shifted by the company and provided with facilities of hospital and school. And if the company closes, we will have livelihood problems," feels Baiju.

Meanwhile, friction is emerging within the various sections that are unanimous in their opposition to mining, but are demanding conflicting solutions. The diehard conservationists want the people to be relocated outside the park in a bid to isolate the region from all human disturbance. These wildlifers

years later, the state government in 1969 granted a 30-year mining lease to the corporation that included 5,218 ha of forestland. The lease was later made over to KIOCL and an open cast mine was set in the heart of Kudremukh in the hills above the source of Bhadra river.

In 1980, studies on impact of mining on ecology by Indian Institute of Science (IISC) recommended that an area of 38,800 ha be declared as a biosphere reserve as any further activity will only accelerate the loss in the ecosystem. As a result, in 1984, declaration of 'Kudremukh notified area' was issued and with it locals, wildlifers and environmentalists started questioning the validity of allowing mining in the core domain of the notified area. The company came in for heavy criticism for the adverse impact of mining at the source of the rivers Bhadra and Tunga. Several naturalists observed the disappearance of many varieties of fish while farmers complained of decline in agricultural productivity downstream due to deposition of mine tailings and increased sickness and disease due to pollution of the Bhadra river. Their case was strengthened when an extensive study in 1984 by Karanth, found that Kudremukh harboured the largest contiguous population of endangered lion tailed macaque. Based on this report, greater protection was granted to the area in 1987 when Kudremukh was notified as a national park with a total area of 60,032.40 ha.

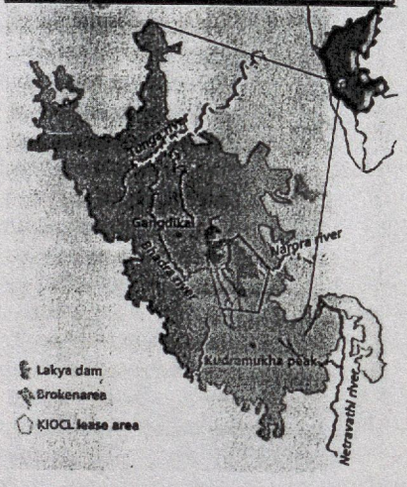
Fresh trouble

Despite measures by the state government, in response to these grave concerns, trouble has been brewing in the Kudremukh area following a series of fresh ecological fallouts as a result of unabated mining. KIOCL's belligerant move to increase the height of Lakya dam by 35 metres without a prior permission from Karnataka State Forest Department in 1991-1994 has already submerged 340 ha of land outside the lease area. The situation was aggravated when a crack appeared in the dam, forcing evacuation of KIOCL township and the villages 45 kms downstream upto Bhadra reservoir. Though the crack was later fixed, threat of the dam collapsing is far from over.

KIOCL, however, remained impervious to these environmental disasters, charting out fresh proposals to build a second dam called Kachige Holey to hold more silt deposits. It was only under tremendous public pressure that the company was forced to scrap its plans. Meanwhile, there have been frequent leakages in the slurry pipe that carries the iron ore to Mangalore. In February 2000, the pipe broke twice, spilling tonnes of iron ore and polluting the Bhadra. For the inhabitants of Kudremukh, mining is today a source of multiple troubles. As K N Murthy, district forest official of Kudremukh wildlife sanctuary, says "With the mines, hundred other companies starting operating. Roads and dams were constructed and vehicles were plying — all in the core area."

All this, however, did not bring KIOCL operations to a halt. The mining activity continued even after expiry of the lease on the basis of a temporary work permit. Complexity came into the picture when the Union governement resorted to double speak following KIOCL's demand for an extention of lease for 20 years. While the forest department asked the state to stop the mining activity within the notified area, the Union government recommended a five-year extension for the company to wind up its operations. But later under pressure from the mining and other lobbies, it recommended a 20-year lease and was even willing to get the mining area denotified from the park. However, intense public pressure forced the state government to go back on this recommendation in favour of the five-year phase-out plan. While KIOCL appears firm in its resolve to continue mining despite a fresh notification of Kudremukh National Park covering 53,600 ha by state government last year, concerned groups have their fingers crossed as they anxiously await the Supreme Court's verdict. Niren Jain of Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation says, "We are waiting for the judgement but have achieved a lot. At least the state has decided not hand over fresh areas for mining." ■

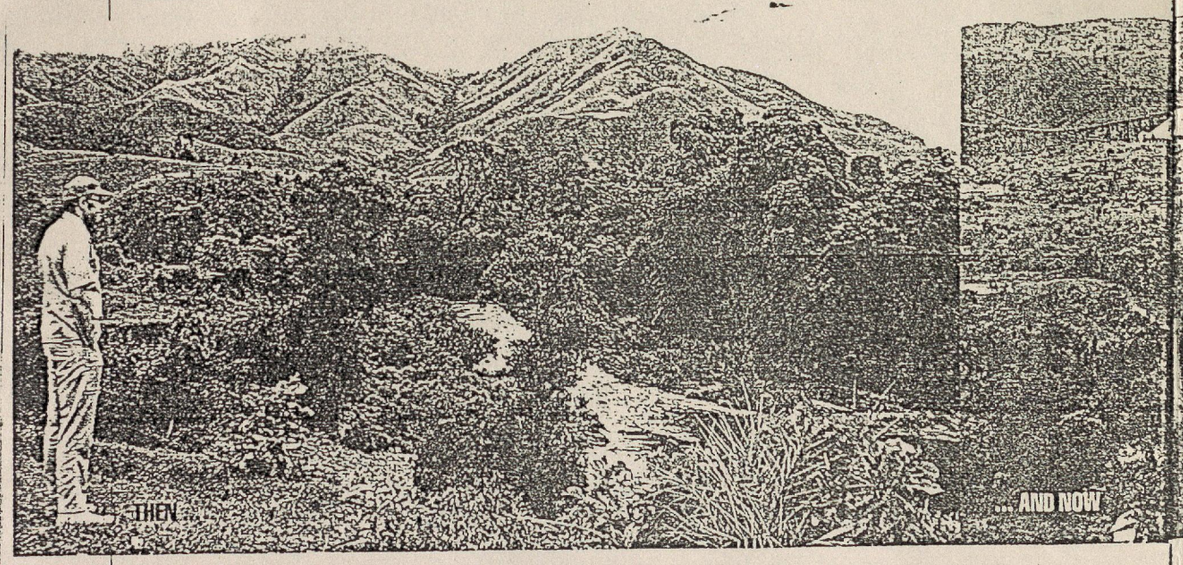
Maimed by mining
Ecologically damaging operation in the heart of Kudremukh National Park



contend that developmental dynamics hamper both wildlife and the local population and want to drive home that a good rehabilitation is possible. According to Niren Jain of Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation, Karkala, the government needs to work on a good package. "Density of local population is in and around national park, and they are exposed to outside market, demography is changing and the forest are no more sustainable for support," he says. A few among them, however, strike a note of caution considering the past performance of the state government. Ullas Karanth, conservation scientist of Wildlife Conservation Society, Bangalore, says: "People are worried about the scheme as the government does not give a good rehabilitation package."

The social non-governmental organisations (NGOs), on the other hand favour a more sustainable existence, opposing prioritisation of wildlife conservation over human concerns. At a rally recently organised jointly by Karnataka Vimochana Ranga, Adivasi Girijana Hitarakshana Samithi, Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, Tunga Moola Ulisi Horata Samiti and Nellibeedu Samrakshana Samithi, it was demanded that the proposal for the declaration of the Kudremukh National Park be withdrawn as thousands of tribals would have to be evacuated from the forest area. Uprooting these people, they feel, is unjustified and prove detrimental to their well being. Even forest authorities admit that there are no simple solutions to this problem. K N Murthy, district forest officer in Kudremukh, says, "Rehabilitation is a very complex issue and we have very limited experience."

KUDREMUKH: The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited KIOCL was granted a mining lease by the State Government for an area of 4605 hectares for a period of 30 years, the validity of which was due to expire in July, 1999. The company had filed an application in June 1998 for renewal of the mining lease with the Governemnt of Karnataka. No decision has yet been conveyed by the State Government in this regard, Minister of State for Steel and Mines Ramesh Bais informed Mr Ramulu.



Photographs by CECIL SALDANHA

The pristine Bhadra river valley of 1968 is now India's largest mining operation

■ MINING

The Ore of Dispute

Prospectors in Karnataka have found enough iron ore to last a century. Problem: it's under an endangered tropical forest and illegal operations are ravaging the area.

By STEPHEN DAVID in Nellibeedu



IN AN EASTERN cradle of the lush forests of Karnataka's Western Ghats lies a mountain shaped like a horse's face (*kudre mukh* in Kannada). It was here, the Ramayan says, that the monkey king Sugreev commanded his simian brigade to search for Ram's consort Sita.

Myth has given way to today's reality. A grand search continues—but for something else. Deep within the earth, blotted out by a thick carpet of tropical forests, lies an estimated one billion tonnes of iron ore. The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd (KIOCL), India's first and largest iron ore and pelletisation company, has been gouging out the ore since 1976 in the heart of the 600 sq km spread of the Kudremukh National Park. But now it has turned its gaze—to the consternation of locals and ecologists—outside its mining area, to the surrounding forests, under which lies a vault of iron ore vast enough to keep the company going for the next century.

KIOCL—itself owned by the Government—got a state government licence three years ago to prospect for some of that ore over 310 hectares, an area 900 times the size of an average cricket stadium. It was given 16 conditions under which this could be done. The order warned that "non-compliance of any of the conditions will annul the prospecting licence". Those violations—hidden from public view—are coming to light now. The major ones:

▶ There was to be no road construction. "A foot track is all that is needed for prospecting," says geologist R.N. Selvan of the Indian Bureau of Mines. Instead, slivers of brown dirt roads snake all the way to the hilltops, ugly gashes that have loosened the top soil and created devastating landslides which silt up the pristine streams flowing into the endangered *shola* forests.

▶ No trees were to be felled. But they clearly have—more than 300 hectares of forest cover has been hacked away, allege local green groups.

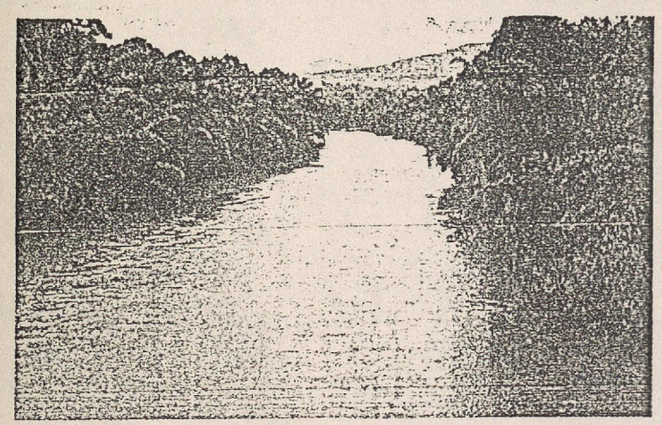
Another minor violation is the non-payment of Rs 5 crore to the Forest Department to develop the national park. No more than a fifth has been paid.

"There is a clear case of violation here and the licence should be annulled," says Kaosi Sethna, former member of the Indian Board of Wildlife. The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) has called for the files. "We'll take appropriate action if there are any violations," says A.N. Negi, conservator of forests in the MOEF's Bangalore office.

Beyond the legalese lies a distrust of KIOCL. Irate villagers say the violations only confirm their misgivings about a company with an uncertain environmental record. "We will block any new mining projects here," says an angry H.S. Palayya, head of the Samse mandal panchayat. He points to the Bhadra river, coloured an angry red from mining refuse called tailings. For long, tailings have piled up along the river banks, in some places up to six feet deep, reducing agricultural productivity and stopping natural riverside vegetation from taking root. The Bhadra river valley houses the mining town of Kudremukh.

"There is a clear case of violation of the conditions laid down and the licence should be annulled."

Kaosi Sethna, *former member of the Indian Board of Wildlife*



The Bhadra river has turned an angry red because of the mining refuse

"We are more concerned about the environment than anyone else," counters KIOCL Managing Director S. Murari. He says the company has planted 80 lakh trees so far. But this only means the forests of Kudremukh—rare species of trees supporting a complex web of animal and plant life—are being replaced by military-line plantations of acacia and eucalyptus, non-native trees that spell the end of the tropical forests.

THE company, struggling now to keep up with today's complex ecological requirements, has a point when it says it was here first. Iron ore was discovered in these hills in 1913. The mining began in 1976 when it was a vast, desolate wilderness. On September 2, 1987, more than a decade after KIOCL's mining activities began, the company found itself bang in the middle of the Kudremukh National Park. "Suddenly, out of the blue, the government decides to put up a board saying 'Kudremukh National Park'," says General Manager K.V. Thyagarajan. "We have been there since 1976 while the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) came only in 1982. That too, the FCA proclamation was made without informing the occupant (us)."

The original lease was granted for 4,900 hectares, before anyone realised Kudremukh was an ecological treasure trove (the actual mining area is 600 hectares). Attracted by the rich veins of iron in the newer areas of Nellibeedu and Shantikoppa adjoining KIOCL's land, the company asked for, and was granted, the new prospecting licence. Now opponents, greatly alarmed by the company's past and recent violations, say the lease itself must not be renewed when it runs out in 1999.

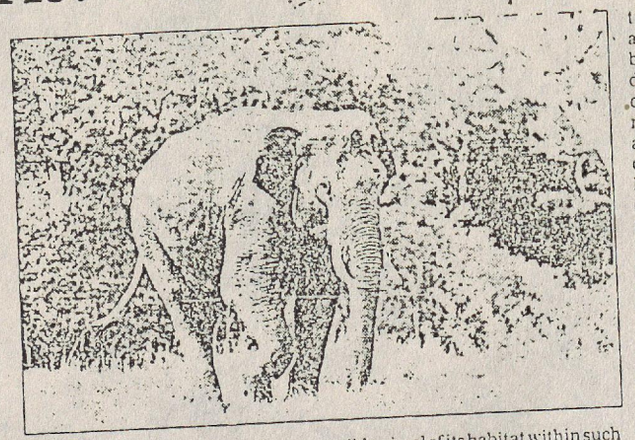
That is unlikely—and unrealistic. If mining activity in the region were to come to a halt, the economic loss would be considerable. In the first three months of this year alone, KIOCL shipped out about $39 million (Rs 1,404 crore) worth of ore. In 1996-97, ore enough to fill nearly 170 cargo ships was exported to China, Japan and Iran.

After spending Rs 3,000 crore to set up a sprawling mining town, complete with a hospital and school, the company is now planning to set up a mineral-water bottling plant and a 60 MW captive power plant in Kudremukh next year. And an application for a prospecting licence for Gangrikal near the Sringeri pilgrimage site is now with the Centre. The state Government is aware of the ecological dangers of uncontrolled mining, but making KIOCL adhere to the rules won't be easy. Karnataka Forest Minister Gurudappa Nagamarpalli says he has "requested the Mines and Geology Department not to permit mining in the fragile ecosystems of the Western Ghats".

Requests are unlikely to keep careless mining in check. The spring at the top of Nellibeedu peak is proof enough. When KIOCL drilled a hole there in February 1996, it struck a gusher. The spring continues to flow to this day, with no attempt to cap it. "Any tampering with ground-water aquifers due to mining may have serious repercussions on rivers, streams and the ground-water table," says Sethna. Springs are usually a herald of natural beauty. This one is more a warning of an impending natural disaster. ■

A Wildlife Act more notable for its lack of protection

B Jagannath Reddy



Byndoor : The Wildlife Protection Act was passed as far back as 1972 in our counry. Unfortunately, the concerned officials of the Forest Department and the Government, who are ultimately in charge of its implementation, have not yet evolved a proper procedure for enforcing the various provisions of the Act, which has resulted in confusion and controversy.

The Act vests the Chief Wildlife Warden with the necessary powers for the management of Wildlife in the state, making him directly responsible to the State Government in this regard, and not the Principal Conservator of Forests, though he may be the Head of the Department.

This point is often overlooked both by the Government and the Principal Conservator of Forests in daily administration, resulting in undermining the authority of the Chief Wildlife Warden.

The ongoing tussle between the Chief Wildlife Warden, Karnataka, and Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited, regarding unauthorised disturbance of wild animals and their habitat in the Kudremukh National Park by the latter, is an example in point.

In this casae, the issue of prospecting licence by the Govt to KIOCL allegedly with the concurrence of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forsets, and without consulting the Chief Wildlife Warden is not justifiable on any account, and constitutes violation of Section 35(6) of the Act which reads as follows :

No person shall destroy, exploit or remove any Wildlife from a National Park or destroy or damage the habitat of any wild animal or deprive any wild animal of its habitat within such National Park, except under, and in accordance with, a permit granted by the Chief Wildlife Warden. No such permission ahall be granted unless the State Government, being satisfied that such destruction, exploitation or removal of Wildlife from the National Park is necessary for the improvement and better management of Wildlife therein, authorises the issue of such permit.

It is clear from teh above that any permit for carrying out any operations involving the disturbance of any wild animal or its habitat has to be issued by the Chief Wildlife Warden as authorised by the State Govt only it is necessary for teh better management of Wildlife therein. The altrnative open to teh State Govt is to denotify any part of the NAtional Park to meet any particular demand other than for improvement and better management of wild life. But this can be done only with the concurrence of the Legislature, according to Section 35(5) of the Act produced below:

"No alteration to the boundaries of a National Park shall be made except on a resolution passed by the Legislative of the State".

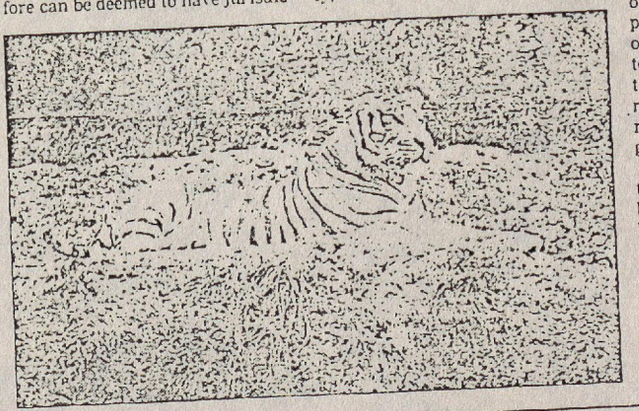
Hence granting of prospecting licence to the company, which does not fulfill either of teh above two stipulation cannot be justified either legally or administratively. This lapse on the part of the Govt appears to be due to its top officers not being sufficiently knowledgeable about the provisions of the Act.

One would have expected at least the Chief Wildlife Warden to know the law and to have prevented this from happening. It is a pity that even the high powered State Wildlife Advisory Board (whose duty it is to advise the State Govt in formulation of policy in granting licence and permit as provided for under Section 8(2) of the Act) did nothing to prevent such a blatant illegality or deal with it subsequently.

According to item No.38 under 'definitions' furnished in Section 2 of the Act, the term "Wildlife includes any animal, bees, butterflies, crustacea, fish and moths and acquatic or land vegetation which forms part of the habitat".

The Chief Wildlife Warden therefore can be deemed to have jurisdiction in respect of management of Wildlife wherever there is wildlife, which means practically all forest areas in the State, administered by the Department. But ordinarily, his writ runs only in special Wildlife divisions, comprising mostly sanctuaries and National Parks in the State, covering approximately 20 % of the total forest area.

Though Territorial Conservators and Deputy Conservators of Forests are also Wildlife Wardens and Deputy Wildlife Wardens respectively, and are subordinate to the Chief Wildlife Warden in matters relating to Wildlife management, in practice they rarely take any orders from him. The Department officials are not familiar with the provisiond of the Act, and hence, there is no integrated approach to the management of Wildlife in the State.



Under these circumstances, it is high time the Department introduces remedial measures at the earliest. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and the Chief Wildlife Warden, in consultation with all other officials concerned, should draw up comprehensive guidelines for the active enforcement of the Act by : regularly conducting refresher courses to ensure that all officers have a thorough knowledge of the Act and its provisions : ensuring the recognition of teh Chief Wildlife Warden as the top most authority in Wildlife matters; setting up coordination committees at State and Circle levels to review the working as per given guidelines.

Unless stringest steps are taken, the Wildlife Act runs the risk of becoming a dead letter in the statute book.

(The writer is a retired officer of the Indian Forest Service, and a former Chief Conservator of Forest and Wildlife Warden, Karnataka, and is currently Honorary Wildlife Warden, Dakshina Kannada.)

Undaunted Kudremukh Co hopes to dig inside national park

By Vinay Madhav

Bangalore, Oct 11: Eternal optimism seems to be the motto of Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited. Even though the Forest Department rejected permission to explore the possibility of mining for iron ore at Gangrikal inside the Kudremukh national park three years ago, KIOCL still nurses hopes of getting the permission.

In the annual report of the KIOCL for the year 1996-97, Chairman and Managing Director A Prasad noted, "As for exploitation of the nearby Nellibeedu deposits, the Company has already completed the prospecting work and looks forward to securing the mining lease in the near future. Prospecting licence for the Gangrikal deposits too has been taken up for consideration of the Government of Karnataka and Government of India. When these two licences are in position, the future of your company as a mining organisation would be secure at least for the next two decades or more.".

However, Forest Department officials say that the proposal for prospecting licence at Gangrikal was dead long ago.

According to sources, in 1994, the KIOCL had sent an application to the Government, seeking licence to prospect the mining possibilities at Gangrikal and Nellibeedu. A team of forest officials including Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (PCCF) and Chief Wild Life Warden visited both Nellibeedu and Gangrikal. While recommending to the Government to issue the prospecting licence at Nellibeedu, the Forest Department had rejected the proposal for Gangrikal.

In a letter dated Dec 16, 1994, written to the Principal Secretary of Forest and Environment Department, then PCCF noted: "After further review of of the matter, it is felt that Grangrikal State Forest should not be subjected to mining under any circumstances. Even prospecting for iron ore should not be allowed in this forest area as it will seriously affect the watershed at Gangamoola, which is the birth place of Tunga, Bhadra and Netravati rivers. It will be detrimental to the ecology of the mountain range, polluting the rivers."

"Therefore, I request you to kindly move the matter with the Government of India, withdrawing proposal submitted for seeking permission of GOI for prospecting licence in Gangrikal area of the Kudremukh National Park," he added.

The principal Secretary in turn wrote a letter to the Secretary to Government of India, Ministry of Environment and Forest on April 17, 1995 urging him to withdraw the proposal.

In his letter, the Principal Secretary said, "The proposal has been re-examined on the recommendation of PCCF and State Government has decided to drop proposal in respect of Gangrikal, that is 912 hectares. Therefore this proposal may kindly be as treated withdrawn from the State Government."

However, the issue erupted again in September this year when a section of press reported that Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) had cleared the proposal for mining in Gangrikal.

And now the annual report of KIOCL for the year 1995-96 and 1996-97 has also quoted that the proposal is still active with the Government.

When contacted, the KIOCL General Manager K V Thyagarajan (personnel) said "We have not received any categorical 'yes' or 'no' from the Government or the Forest Department. Hence we live in high hope that we may get prospecting licence some day. However, we do not want to defy the sentiments of the local people and go ahead."

However, a senior Forest Department official noted that the KIOCL had sent the proposal for prospecting licence for both Nellibeedu and Gangrikal in the same application. When the Government had issued the licence for Nellibeedu, that would mean that Government was not interested in issuing licence for prospecting at Gangrikal.

It was not necessary to send official messages saying that their other proposal was not considered.

"It is left to one's common sense to understand that the other proposal is dead when only one of the two proposals is cleared," he said.

Govt. clears 50 MW power plant at Kudremukh

By Our Correspondent

CHIKMAGALUR, May 20.

The Government's clearance has been obtained for a 50-MW power plant and work on it will commence soon, Mr. K.S.Thyagarajan, General Manager of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL), said at Kudremukh recently.

He told presspersons that discussions were being held with the Government regarding the dispute over the power tariff with the Karnataka Electricity Board. He was confident of a solution soon.

Mr. S.Murari, Administrative Director (Production), said the KIOCL, in collaboration with McCann and MSTC, would launch the Kudremukh Iron and Steel Company (KISCO) to produce low sulphur pig iron pellets which is in demand. Shares are being floated for this Rs. 344-crore project to be launched by the year end, he said.

The survey report for the proposed expansion on 310 hectares of land in the Nellibeedu region will be obtained this month and an application for mining lease will also be submitted.

About 400 million tonnes of ore has been identified in the Gangadikal area. Hard ore can be obtained from the existing area and samples have been sent to Canada and the U.S. to determine its extraction feasibility. Similarly, samples of tailings from the Lakya dam had been sent to Australia, Mr. Murari said.

Established in 1976, the company has been showing profits during the last eight years. It paid dividends of Rs. 20.6 crores to the Government during the last five years. Its turnover last year was Rs. 522 crores and it had earned $ 140 millions in foreign exchange, he said.

Mr. Murari reiterated that the KIOCL was committed to the development of the surrounding areas. His company has installed a water supply system at Kulasa and two health centres at Nellibeedu and Kudremukh in addition to contributing for the construction of bridges and playgrounds for schools. The company is concerned about the development of ecology and environment and has spent Rs. 18 crores to plant 45-lakh seedlings. According to a survey, the Bhadra river is not being polluted by the KIOCL, he said.

The company contributed about 25 per cent of the 25 million tonnes of the iron ore exported from the country. The company suffered a production loss to the extent of about Rs. 30 crores when it was forced to close down for a week following the Supreme Court order that mining should not be carried out in forest areas. A joint survey report has proved that the mining area was not forest land, he said and was thanked Mr. B.B.Ningaiah, Minister of State for Animal Husbandry, and Mr. B.L.Shankar, Chikmagalur MP, for negotiating on behalf of the company.

KIOCL gets Centre's nod for power plant

CHIKMAGALUR, May 24 (PTI)

The Centre has accorded permission to Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd (KIOCL) to establish a separate 60 MW power plant according to KIOCL's general manager, Mr K S Tygarajan.

Talking to reporters here, Mr Tyagarajan said the KIOCL was also contemplating to launch a new company, similar to KIOCL, to produce low sulphur pig iron pellets, which were in good demand, in collaboration with the Mecann and MSTC.

The KIOCL had decided to float shares for Rs 344 crore for this joint venture project, he added.

Regarding the mining activity, Mr Tyagarajn clairified that the organisation had taken adequate preventive measures to check pollution in Bhadra river and its tributaries at Kudremukh.

He said following directions from the Supreme Court, mining activity was stalled for a short period recently, hampering production to the tune of 1.5 lakh tonnes, resulting in a loss of Rs 30 crore to the company.

However, Mr Tyagarjan said, the company had completed experimental mining at Nellibeedu area and had urged the state government to lease out the required area for commencing mining activity.

At present, the country was exporting twenty million tonnes of iron ore, of which the KIOCL alone was transporting six million tonnes of iron ore, he said.

The KIOCL was giving top priority to rehablitation and seventy one families had been rehabilitated so far with each member being provided a suitable job at the company on humanitarian grounds, Mr Tygarajan added.

'Kudremukh facing a mining lease crisis'

The Hindu, Business Line Sept 11th, '99

R. Mohan

MYSORE, Sept. 10

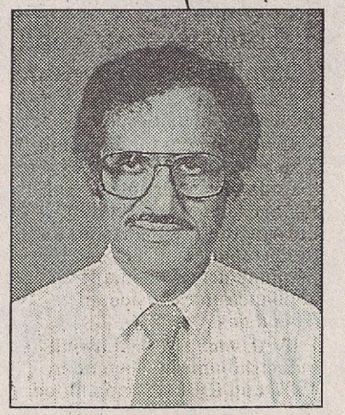
KUDREMUKH Iron Ore Company Ltd (KIOCL), one of the few profit-making public sector companies, is up against a crisis which is threatening its survival.

The Karnataka Forest Department (wildlife) proposal to make the KIOCL mining area and the existing forest in Chikmagalur district a 'National Reserve Park' may put the company's existence in jeopardy.

KIOCL was given a 30-year-mining lease in 1969 to exploit the iron ore from the then steel plant in Iran. Later, with chaos in Iran, KIOCL easily found other markets such as Japan.

The notification that it would be made a national park came in 1986. The mining lease expired last year and KIOCL officials waited till the last day of expiry — July 24, 1999 — to be informed that they could continue for another year.

Originally, when leased to KIOCL, the area was classified either as a forest land or a farm land. KIOCL's efforts at making the area environment-friendly turned it into a rich greenery.



Mr. S. Murari, Chairman and Managing Director, KIOCL

The Chairman and Managing Director of KIOCL, Mr. S. Murari, said the 100 per cent EOU was a Star Trading House and also an ISO 9002 company earning $150 millions in foreign exchange every year. It had recorded a consistent growth posting a turnover of Rs. 548 crores in 1998-99, which was, in fact, a bad year due to recession. The company employs 2,400 persons, mostly from Karnataka, though the unit is a Central PSU.

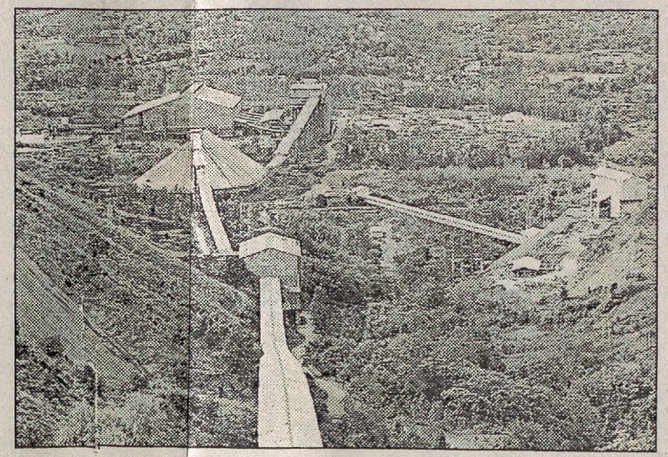
He said there had been no complaints of pollution from the KIOCL mine. A Rs. 116-crore erthen dam had been constructed on River Bhadra to contain solid wastes and then, the recycled water was used for industrial purposes. The likelihood of rainwater carrying tailings is prevented by two rock filled dams in the valleys.

The Forest Department proposal is currently in court where objections have been invited. Some 1,200 cases of objections, including the KIOCL petition, are pending.

A former Chief Conservator of Forests has also been on record saying that damage to ecology would be minimal because of the conservation measures of KIOCL. The National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) is currently studying any possible damage to the proposed park. Mr. Murari is confident the NEERI finding would favour continuation of mining.

KIOCL upgrades a low grade iron ore into a good grade acceptable to importers. It accounts for 20 per cent of the iron ore exports of the country. The mining in the present area has been yielding 'soft ore', the deposits of which will be exhausted in about eight years. Then, KIOCL would have to mine 'hard ore', calling for higher costs.

However, two other deposits, one at Nellibedu and another larger one at Gangarikal can also yield good ore if KIOCL is permitted to mine. With the main mine's fate itself in doubt, it remains to be seen whether KIOCL can move on to better deposits.



An overview of Kudremukh Iron Ore Company in Chikmagalur district in Karnataka.

"Ultimately, it is a question of the country choosing between mining with zero or minimal damage to the economy and keep earning precious foreign exchange," said Mr. K.V. Thyagarajan, an Executive Director. He said KIOCL had won the Abheraj Baldote environment award from the Federation of Indian Mineral Industries for greening a bald, waste land.

KIOCL recently settled a long-standing dispute with the Karnataka Electricity Board by paying Rs. 81 crores this year as arrears. KIOCL had claimed that it did not owe any money since it was paying according to the concessional rate granted to it originally. This payment reduced its profits to Rs. 18.47 crores for the year ending March 1999.

KIOCL will be better off with a captive power plant, particularly if it must exploit 'hard ore', but such an expensive project of over Rs. 2,500 crores could hardly be undertaken if its future is in the balance.

Prospecting approval violates wildlife Act

By Aditi Kapoor

NEW DELHI, December 20.

The Union environment ministry's approval for granting 310.10 hectares of land in Nellibidu, Karanataka, to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Co. Limited (K.I.O.C.L.), is against the Wildlife (Protection) Act. It also violates various articles of the Convention on Biological Diversity ratified by India recently. This area falls within the Kudremukh National Park.

So says a letter to the Union environment secretary signed by Mr Shekhar Singh, former Planning Commission advisor and ihead of the environment cell of the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA). The other signatories include Ms Malti Sen of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)- India, well-known environmentalist Chandi Prasad Bhatt and over 15 other concerned environmentalists from organisations in various parts of the country.

The signatories have asked environment minister Kamal Nath to reject both these proposals within a fortnight. Else, the signatories threaten to initiate public agitation and take recourse to legal action.

The letter says K.I.O.C.L. has applied for prospecting in 914.75 hectares in Gangrikal which too falls within the national park area.

"The Kudremukh company had asked for a larger area for prospecting, but we have limited this to just 310 hectares in the corner of the forest area," says joint secretary Alok Jain of the Union environment ministry. "Yes, the area does fall under the national park but absolutely no environmental damage will be caused by prospecting. The approval has been given under section 2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, with no sanction for felling of trees and other conditions as are usual in allowing prospecting in forest areas."

The ministry communicated its approval to the state government in its letter dated May 30 last. The Kudremukh National Park was declared to be a protected area by the state government in its notification No. AHFF 42 FWL 87, dated September 2, 1987. Interestingly, no environment impact assessment report was necessary, because under the EIA rules the forest conservation wing of the Union ministry can approve proposals for less than 500 hectares.

"By no stretch of imagination can prospecting for iron ore be seen as being for the 'improvement and better management' of wildlife....prospecting would lead to the environmental degradation of the ecologically valuable area," says the letter.

The signatories say it seems unreasonable to give permission for prospecting unless further permission is expected to be given for mining. Else, the expenditure on prospecting is not be justified.

"That is the second stage of decision making," says Mr. Jain. "Such a decision would depend on a host of circumstances, but the ministry is always extremely reluctant and very severe on conservation in such matters."

Legally, the National Park is still an "intended" national park, but a 1989 survey by the IIPA showed that only 21 of India's national parks have completed all the legal formalities. The rest — 60 per cent — are still "intended" national parks.

"Assuming therefore, the need to treat intended parks as deserving the same level of protection as fully constituted national parks, barring the extinction of existing rights and activities, it is very regrettable that in this case new activities are being permitted in this national park," says the letter.

Mr Jain the K.I.O.C.L. has been prospecting in the area for some years. "Very often prospecting and mining in forest areas precedes the notification of a national park. In this case, the Kudremukh company has been prospecting in the area for some years."

Forest Department to initiate action against KIOCL

By Vinay Madhav

Bangalore, Sept 24: The Forest Department will initiate action against public sector giant Kuduremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL), for violating prospecting norms in Nellibeedu region of the Kuduremukh National Park in Chikmagalur district.

Chief Wild-Life Warden A K Varma told *The Indian Express* that the company had flouted rules many times in the last three years.

KIOCL obtained a licence in 1994 for iron ore prospecting in Nellibeedu area. However, the Forest Department rejected them permission to prospect in the Gangrikallu range. The licence had set a 16-point guideline for KIOCL. The company was forbid from felling trees and building roads to help in the prospecting venture. It was also asked to pay Rs five crore to the Forest Department as fees for a three-year lease.



KIOCL has built roads from Nellibeedu junction to Sujigudda, violating licence norms, inside the Kudremukh National Park area to prospect for iron ore deposits. —Express

"It is evident that KIOCL has built roads inside the National Park from Nellibeedu tar-road junction towards Sujigudda. They have paid only Rs 1.2 lakh to the Forest Department as against the Rs five crore stipulated. I will visit the place in two weeks and study the whole issue," Varma said.

GOVT FLOUTED RULES: Forest Department sources said the State Government itself had flouted rules while granting the 1994 licence to KIOCL.

In a Government Order (GO) issued on July 15, 1994, the State Government sanctioned 310 hectares of forest land in Kuduremukh National Park (Nellibeedu area) to KIOCL. While doing so, the Government overlooked the Wild-Life Protection Act, 1972 and recommended to the Government of India that the land be leased to KIOCL under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, the sources said.

National Parks and Wild-Life Sanctuaries are covered under the Wild-Life Protection Act, 1972 and any activity in a sanctuary or park can be considered only on the recommendation of the Chief Wild-Life Warden. The State Government is required to satisfy itself that deforestation, exploitation of the resources or removal of wild-life from the sanctuary "is necessary for the improvement and better management of wild-life" before issuing licences. The Government

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Forest Dept to initiate action...

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They said the Government Order was frought with contradictions. On the one hand, the Government directed KIOCL to include certain agencies like the Remote Sensing Agency and Geological Survey of India to locate iron deposits outside the park area. On the other, the licence allowed KIOCL to prospect inside the National Park itself.

The licence clearly says "the prospecting licence will not *ipso facto* imply any commitment on the part of the State or Government of India to issue a mining licence. The non-compliance of any of the conditions, would annul the prospecting licence granted." However, so far, no agency has probed the violations, the sources said.

LOCK HORNS: Meanwhile, KIOCL and the Forest Department in Kuduremukh are locked in a dispute over land-ownership in the Kuduremukh mining area. While KIOCL contends that the mining area was non-forest agricultural land, the Forest Department says it was part of the National Park.

In the process, KIOCL seems to have made a mockery of law and even common sense. Sources said the company, while changing the *khatha* of the mining land, had listed individuals as owners of the land and had given the individual's father's name as KIOCL! The Forest officials are now wondering how a company could ever be a father to individuals.

Recently, Forest Department officials had seized bulldozers and other equipment belonging to KIOCL while the company was attempting to raise the height of Lakya dam near the mining area without permission from the Forest Department. The Forest Department now wants to initiate action against all violations committed by KIOCL in and around Kuduremukh, the sources added.

Firm wants to mine on new hill areas

Says minerals came before trees

BY JAIDEEP V.G.

Bangalore, June 4: The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited has approached the state for two mining leases to mine and prospect for about 450 million tonnes of ore outside the present mining area in Kudremukh. The move has attracted severe opposition from locals and environmentalists who claim further mining will pollute the rivers Bhadra and Tunga and forest reserves in Chikmagalur district.

According to the executive director of KIOCL, Mr K.V. Thyagarajan, the company has approached the state for a new mining lease and a lease to prospect for iron ore in Kudremukh. "The new mining lease we have applied for is to mine at Nellibeedu. We have estimated that approximately 50 million tonnes of ore is available in about 310 hectares in the area. The place is near the existing infrastructure to transport the ore to our main facility. The second

KUDREMUKH

lease is to prospect for ore in the Gangdikallu area. Though scientific estimations are yet to be conducted, we think about 400 million tonnes of material is available for mining. This area is diagonally opposite Nellibeedu and near the river Bhadra. Both these areas are situated outside the present mining area," he told *The Asian Age*.

Moreover, the present mining lease awarded for 30 years, expires in July, 1999. "We have applied for an extension of the present lease along with the other two lease applications," Mr Thyagarajan added. The renewed leases are likely to allow mining for about 20 years more.

However, residents of Kudremukh and environmentalists have urged the state not to renew the licences or issue new mining leases to the company. According to representatives of the Nellibeedu Samrakshana Samiti, mining in the proposed areas will lead to an environmental disaster. "After mining in the area for the past 30 years, the silt and iron waste from the mines have polluted the Bhadra river. Moreover, dumping of hilly soil on vegetation has ruined the hills. Because of repeated use of explosives, many rare species have disappeared in the last three decades," a representative said. "Even the afforestation pro-

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threatened him that he will commit suicide if he does not

city.

Mr Somanna said a chief engineer would be specially appointed in KEB to monitor power supply to the city. A decision to this affect will be formalised by the KEB at its board meeting on June 22. He said KEB would also seek the state government's approval to set up a co-generation power plant to generate power from wet garbage. The power generated from this plant will be utilised for street lights in the city, he added. He also said the government had decided to add six more mobile fault repair vans to the existing three with the KEB for redressal of public grievances on power supply. He said a 66 kV sub station would bet set up near Kanteerava stadium.

Firm wants to mine on new hill areas

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-gramme undertaken by KIOCL is not properly conceived. Only trees like acacia are being planted there, leading to monoculture," the representative added.

According to a memorandum submitted by the organisation to the state, the Gangdikallu area is the birth place of the river Tunga and locals fear that mining waste will pollute the river.

The other point made in the memorandum is that the Nellibeedu area, being above the river Bhadra, feeds the river waters during the monsoon. "If mining is carried out in Nellibeedu, pollutants are bound to find their way to the river Bhadra," the memorandum said.

KIOCL officials quoted the development-conservation dichotomy while defending the move to expand operations in the area. "The NGOs and environmentalists just want to put down everything we are doing. Do they have alternatives if mining is stopped and the country's steel industry grinds to a halt?" asked Mr Thayagarajan. "Moreover, we have to make a compromise somewhere. The minerals in the area have evolved over the past few billion years. The forests have a regeneration rate of about 300 years. This means that the minerals were underneath the earth before the forests sprung up," he added.

The Times of India Aug 15th 199.

KIOCL: What after one year?

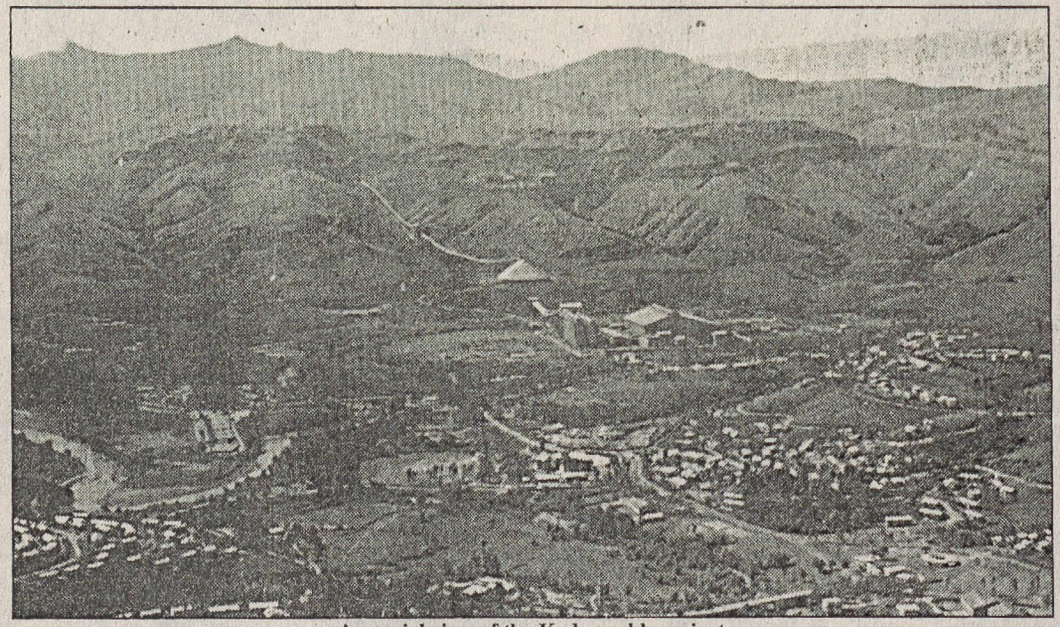
The company is faced with an uncertain future but the management is confident says *Kingshuk Nag*

The sword of Damocles' hangs over the public sector, Kudremukh Iron and Ore Company Limited (KIOCL). Even though the company has managed to obtain a temporary 'work permit' after its 30-year-long mining lease expired in late July, stark uncertainty about the future stares KIOCL in the face.

The 'work permit', which has been granted, is valid only for a year and what is more, it places severe restrictions on the activities of the company. On expiry of the permit, on July 24, 2000, it will again have to go to the government of Karnataka and the Centre. That the job of obtaining an extension will not be a simple affair is easy to see: the management had to slug it out for almost a year for the work permit it has secured now. The permit was given on the last day, barely hours before the operations of KIOCL would have to come to a halt.

The temporary work permit has thrown awry the plans of the company. KIOCL's mining area, it seems, has ores enough to last only a few more years. Beyond that, in its existing area the company can mine only 'hard' ore (KIOCL is now exploiting 'soft' ores). 'Hard' ore requires a higher input of power for exploitation and to prepare for the eventuality, a captive power unit of 60 MW capacity is being planned by the company. In fact, bids have been floated and received. Three parties — BHEL, Hyundai and a Japanese consortium — have bid for the project.

"Obviously, without a clear mandate to mine for (say) 20 or 30 years, it does not make sense to set up a Rs 2,500-crore captive power plant. Yet, the process has been kicked off. All this in the midst of uncertainty," said an analyst. According to KIOCL's chairman and managing director S. Murari, the area has hard ore reserves to last 25 years.



An aerial view of the Kudremukh project.

In what is more unnerving, the contract for supply of ores and pellets to Japan will come up for renegotiation next year. Japan is one of the major customers of the company and it is easy to see that KIOCL's bargaining power will be compromised in this scenario. Added to this, its deal with Chinese agencies. KIOCL has a year-to-year contractual agreement with Chinese agencies. KIOCL is also suffering due to the vagaries of fortunes of its main customer-Iran (see box).

In a sense, the pangs the KIOCL is facing could have been avoided if it had woken up early. The seeds of the troubles now faced by the iron ore company dates back to 1987, when the state government suddenly decided to declare the area where KIOCL has its mining lease as a 'national environmental park'. Kudremukh lies on the Western Ghats and is rich in flora and fauna. It also receives very heavy rainfall — around 200 inches a year — and these were the reasons for declaring the place as a national park. However, the notification of the area as a park was apparently done without following proper procedures. This would have entailed first seeking public objections and then disposing them off.

KIOCL's then management also did not bother and things went on as usual till recently. Even as the period of the mining licence (granted for 30 years in 1969) was coming to an end, environmentalists swung into action and asserted that open cast mining by KIOCL was destroying the trees and wild life.

At this point, the state government realised the national park did not have proper boundaries — not the least because there was dispute about part of the land on which it stands. In technical parlance, it is not clear whether the land is revenue land or forest land.

Now, the district collector of the place has called for public objections and is engaged in determining to whom does the land belongs to. Apparently, 100 objections have been filed and among them are some from KIOCL. "What can we do. We came first. The park came later and now we are told we are in the middle of the park," says Mr Murari. He adds: "We have always taken pains to preserve the environment in the area and have undertaken major afforestation programmes."

While giving an extension of one year, the central government asked the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) to study the operations of KIOCL from the environmental angle. Mr Murari is confident KIOCL would pass the NEERI test.

Former principal chief conservator of forests of Karnataka, T. Shyam Sunder, seems to agree with the view of management. "KIOCL is a well managed company from the point of view of taking care of the environment. However, any kind of mining will lead to some ecological problems."

Mr Shyam Sunder adds: "So much investment has gone into the company. Does it make any sense to close the company ?" A total of Rs 962 crore has been invested in the company ever since it was floated.

Turnover in '98-99 dips

KIOCL's turnover has dropped substantially for fiscal 1998-99. At Rs 579.71 crore, it is much less than the Rs 607.15 crore recorded in the last financial year. Net profit at Rs 18.47 crore for 1998-99 is lower than the Rs 82.40 crore for the previous year. The results were finalised late last month.

It is understood these lower figures have to do with less than possible offtake from Iran, which is the major customer for KIOCL. Apparently, Iran did not have adequate cash to lift the ore it had contracted. KIOCL was not willing to supply ore to Iran on a deferred cash basis without any proper guarantees.

However, in the last fiscal, following a long pending dispute with the Karnataka Electricity Board, KIOCL had to pay Rs 77.5 crore. If this payment had not been made, the net profit figures would have boosted to a figure higher than that of 1998-99. Incidentally, KIOCL had not provided for the eventuality of paying up the disputed dues to the electricty board in last year's profit and loss account and this had been recorded by the statutory auditors of the company. – KN

Kudremukh lease extended

Greens oppose mining in Ghats

BY NAAZREEN PRASAD BHURA

SPOTLIGHT

Bangalore, July 21: The Union ministry of environment and forests has approved a year's temporary extension of the mining lease held by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited in the Kudremukh National Park. The ministry has however, attached a rider. It has asked the state to study the environmental impact of mining in the park area within the year, according to official sources.

The 30-year lease held by the KIOCL expires on July 26.

"The company is being permitted to continue mining only in the already opened up area. It cannot break open fresh ground for mining during this period," sources said.

The state mines and geology department is shortly expected to issue a working permit to the company to continue mining, based on the temporary clearance given by the Union environment ministry, sources said.

Besides specifying the need for an environmental impact study, the Union ministry has directed the state and the company to study the impact of mining on the wildlife and water sources, such as the Bhadra river, in the park area. The state is said to be considering using the services of organisations like the National Environmental Engineering and Research Institute, Nagpur, and the Wildlife

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ned that their faction was approached us. We intend to go on our own.

Lease extended

■Continued from Page 9

Institute of India to carry out the studies. The extension of the lease comes at a time when environmentalists in the state are gearing up to oppose mining in the park area. The activists claim that the KIOCL has a poor record of carrying out environmental protection measures.

The KIOCL occupies about 310 hectares of the 6,000 hectares which the state intends to declare a national park. In 1987, the government issued a preliminary notification on declaring the area as the Kudremukh National Park. The final notification on this will be issued after the revenue department evaluates the rights of the people living within its limits.

While state officials maintain that the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 provides for temporary extension of a mining lease pending final clearance, the Environment Support Group, a local non-governmental organisation claims such a provision does not exist.

Anticipating a temporary extension of the mining lease to the KIOCL, the NGO said in a July 20 letter to the Union environment minister, Mr Suresh Prabhu, that "any such clearance accorded involving highly complex policy matters, such as continuance of mining within national parks, would attract the provisions of the election code of conduct."

"With less than two per cent of India's land mass under national parks, as Union minister for environment and forests, it is your call to fight to save the highly threatened and endemic shola forests such as in the Kudremukh National Park and surrounding regions. Not only would this be lawful, but would also demonstrate your resolve to spare no effort in protecting what little is left of our forests,"

Mr Leo F. Saldanha, co-ordinator of the group said in the letter, copies of which have been sent to the Election Commission and chief minister J.H. Patel.

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19/09/99. Times of India P-3.

Greens plan PIL against Kudremukh company

Swati Sucharita

BANGALORE: Environmental groups are planning to file a public interest litigation (PIL) in early October for "infringements on the Wildlife Act 1972" committed by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd (KIOCL), for mining in the Kudremukh Valley.

The petitioners, including the Bangalore-based Environment Support Group, are also planning to rope in the support of Japanese NGOs to lobby for a ban in their country on iron ore imported from Kudremukh.

The valley, located in the Chikmagalur district of Karnataka, has been declared a national park since it has one of the rare species of 'shola' (thick forest valley with hilltops covered by grasslands), endemic only to the Western Ghats in India. With KIOCL getting a year's extension of their mining lease in July, environmentalists are particularly concerned over the fact that the decision has been taken completely ignoring the objections of the Chief Wildlife Warden (CWW) of Karnataka.

In an unofficial note to the principal chief conservator of forests dated March 17, the CWW has concluded that "the continuance of mining activities will be injurious to the existence of wildlife in the national park" and therefore recommended to "bring to a halt all mining activities within the national park on July 27, 1999." This was the original date on which the 30-year lease, initiated in 1969 was supposed to expire.

While the Wildlife Act makes the CWW's permission mandatory for decisions like this, he seems to have been overruled in the decision of the environment ministry at the Centre.

- The KIOCL's contention that the loss of flora/fauna in the reservoir area will be fully made up by its sustained green belt programme is not convincing the Greens who contend that the species planted ie acacias, silver oak and eucalyptus, are not indigenous to the valley and will therefore not be accepted by the wild animals.

As an annoyed Leo Saldanha, coordinator-trustee of Environment Support Group says, "How can you expect a lion-tailed macaque, just one of the rare wildlife species present in the forests, to switch its cuisine?"

Meanwhile, the Greens are waiting with bated breath for the outcome of the public hearing scheduled for October 28 on the fate of the second dam to be built on the Kachigehole distributary over the Bhadra river.

The Kachige hole dam represents an expansion of KIOCL's mining activities and is proposed initially as a reservoir dam of 90m height, with a provision to raise the height to 115m to convert into a tailings-cum-water storage dam at a later date, if necessary.

This would supplement the existing 100m-high Lakya dam which is primarily meant for storing tailings, atypical waste product of ore mining. A rapid environmental impact assessment (REIA) has been done by Nircon Engineering Consultants (Madras) Private Limited, but the perception is that the REIA is mainly an adulatory document calling KIOCL environmentally sensitive.

Moreover, while KIOCL was permitted in 1992 only to prospect in the Nellibeedu region of the valley, it has also cut roads and conducted blasting operations scaring away the wildlife from the drilled bore-wells on Sujigudda mountain, and felling hundreds of trees to carry power transmission lines.

SAVING KUDREMUKH

State evacuates tribals but extends lease for mining firm

B'lore Age. 15th March '99

By Bhaskar Hegde

Kudremukh, March 14: In conflicting moves, the government has, on the one hand, initiated steps to get national park status for the Kudremukh evergreen forest and, on the other, made moves to extend the lease period of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited to carry out mining activity in the core area of the forest.

According to a source in the forest department, the chief conservator of forests (wildlife), Mr S.K. Chakrabarti, has sought more information from the iron ore company with reference to its proposal for extension of lease. The proposal is likely to be sanctioned on receipt of the information, the source added. When contacted, Mr Chakrabarti refused to comment on the issue.

According to a local non-governmental organisation, Nagarika Seva Trust, the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited has already excavated nearly 10,000 acres of pristine forest land in two decades. Besides this public sector enterprise, a private player, Jayaprakash Group of Industries, has also shown interest in mining in this region.

However, much to the discomfiture of these players, Union minister for forest environment Suresh Prabhu, who visited the spot in February, said no extensions or new proposals regarding mining in the area would be entertained.

Meanwhile, the revenue department has begun steps to displace tribals residing in the forest, a pre-requisite to be fulfilled to get national park status.

The assistant commissioners of Sringeri, Puttur and Kundapur revenue sub-division, as required, have already completed the process of registering objections from those families to be displaced in the project, which includes a local tribe, Malaikudias. Officials in the forest department have contended that these people do not qualify as tribals as they own agriculture lands. Tribals, according to law, have special rights and cannot be easily displaced by the government. The co-ordinator of the Environment Support Group, Mr Ranjan Rao Yerdoor, and president of the trust, Mr K. Somanath Naik, have reacted to this statement saying the department has not been authorised to judge which community qualifies as tribal. The state social welfare and Union government documents state that Malaikudias are considered as

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State evacuates tribals

■Continued from Page 9

tribals, according to Mr Naik. Referring to the Centre's policy, the two leaders, along with other organisations which have recorded public opinion on this issue, maintained that since the locals are opposed to the move, the government cannot force their decision on the people.

Stressing the need to immediately get national park status for the Kudremukh forest, the organisations suggested that the government exclude the tribals' habitat from the boundary of the national park, as the tribals reside almost on the periphery of the forest.

Mudigere TP opposes mining in Nellibidu

04 Aug 97

DH News Service

CHIKMAGALUR, Aug 3

The Mudigere Taluk Panchayat has unanimously decided not to allow the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) to take up mining activities in the Nellibidu area as part of its expansion operations.

This was revealed by the president of the taluk unit of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, (KRRS), Mr D R Duggappa Gowda. He praised the taluk panchayat for responding to the Sangha's request to take a decision opposing mining in the area.

The request letter sent by the KRRS to the taluk panchayat states that since KIOCL's mining operations were being undertaken at the Bhadra river source, there was a danger of it getting dried up. The groundwater table has, in the meanwhile, come down considerably because of mining, the letter says. The soil and rocks which have become loose due to the huge machines and explosives used for mining rush into the fields destroying crops and causing huge damages to farmers. The Bhadra river has turned red with dangerous pollutants and minerals being released into the river, the letter added. The Bhadra river was the main source of drinking water to people of Chikmagalur, Shimoga, Chitradurga and Bellary districts apart from being utilised for agricultural purposes. There is the danger of the contaminated water affecting the thousands of families who are dependent on the river, the letter points out.

The letter has said that the Centre and the State had permitted the KIOCL to undertake mining operations in Nellibidu, Shuntikumbri and Soojigudda in 1995 on an experimental basis for three years, even after being told about the dangers of extensive mining. The letter has alleged that drinking water supply has been disrupted after the Company started mining in these areas, apart from the serious effects on the environment.

The letter further states that the losses incurred by the state due to mining is far higher compared to the profits earned. In this background, the letter had requested the taluk panchayat not to allow mining in the area.

Greens oppose second dam by firm to check mining waste

Asian Age June 6th '99

BY JAIDEEP V.G.

KUDREMUKH

Bangalore, June 5:

The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited has prepared plans to construct a Rs 86-crore, 100-metre dam at Kudremukh to prevent waste from the mines reaching the river Bhadra. Residents have opposed the dam because an existing dam built for the same purpose developed fissures, allowing mineral waste to enter the river.

According to company officials, the dam is being constructed at Kochige Hole to ease pressure on the existing Lakya Dam. "The Lakya Dam was constructed in 1978 with an initial height of 65 metres to serve two purposes. First, to contain mineral wastes originating from the mines, and second to provide water for industrial use. The dam was raised to its present height of 100 metres in 1992," said executive director of the company, Mr K.Y. Thayagarajan. "But we now feel that we must have one dam to store waste from mines and the other to provide water for the industry; which is why the new dam is being planned," he added.

The Lakya Dam is constructed on the principle that mineral wastes from the mines gradually get deposited against the dam walls. "A small gradient in the reservoir allows for the sediments to be deposited over a large, almost flat surface against the dam walls. The water left behind after the sediments settle is re-circulated into the KIOCL factory for use. Depending on the level of sediments collected in the reservoir, we use gravity tunnels to channel the water into the factory," Mr Thayagarajan explained. The Lakya Dam can be used for about eight years more, he added.

Mr Thayagarajan dismissed claims of environmentalists that the dams are a threat to the Kudremukh ecosystem. "We are building the dam to keep the river clean. And it is absolutely false that the Lakya Dam developed a breach, leaking waste into the river," he said.

The new proposed dam will be constructed on the same lines as the Lakya Dam and will augment the exiting dam in containing mineral wastes and providing water to the factory.

However, locals have opposed the project, questioning its environmental impact. "Firstly, the Lakya Dam breached a few years ago, resulting in mineral waste escaping into the river. Secondly, the area experienced mild earthquakes for 20 consecutive days in 1996 because of extensive use of explosives and huge iron waste deposits at the Lakya Dam. The other important point is that KIOCL has not prepared a disaster management plan to prepare for and contain any damage," a

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DECCAN HERALD

Thursday, September 10, 1998

Land encroachment in Kudremukh National Park criticised

BANGALORE, Sept 9 (DHNS)

The Environment Support Group (ESG) has criticised the alleged land encroachment by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company (KIOCL) into the Kudremukh National Park and has demanded that a CBI inquiry should be ordered in this regard.

Addressing a press conference here today along with ESG Co- Ordinator Leo F Saldanha, Mr K R Sethna, honorary Wildlife Warden of Chickmagalur said since 1994, various representations, protests and public meetings have been initiated by leading environmentalists to draw the attention of the government against allowing mining in Kudremukh region, which was the most sensitive ecosystem of the Western Ghats.

In spite of this, the Centre and State governments have proceeded with sanctioning license to KIOCL. This was in blatant violation of significant provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act, which grants the most protected status for National Parks anywhere in the country.

Though the authorities have been saying that mining activities would not be allowed in forest areas, KIOCL had made roads roads through the mountainous and in wholly endemic shola forests, engaged in blasting operations in the Nellibeedu region, drilled nearly 48 bore-wells and also cut innumerable trees to draw power transmission lines. All these had been in violation of rules, he argued.

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Land encroachment in Kudremukh National Park criticised

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D/H

DH News Service

BANGALORE, Sept 9

The Environment Support Group (ESG) has criticised the alleged land encroachment by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company (KIOCL) into the Kudremukh National Park and has demanded that a CBI inquiry should be ordered in this regard.

Addressing a press conference here today along with ESG Co-Ordinator Leo F Saldanha, Mr K R Sethna, honorary Wildlife Warden of Chickmagalur said since 1994, various representations, protests and public meetings have been initiated by leading environmentalists to draw the attention of the government against allowing mining in Kudremukh region, which was the most sensitive ecosystem of the Western Ghats. In spite of this, the Centre and State governments have proceeded with sanctioning license to KIOCL. This was in blatant violation of significant provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act, which grants the most protected status for National Parks anywhere in the country.

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■ ENVIRONMENT

KUDREMUKH CONCERNS

Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited faces an uncertain future following a legal challenge to its mining operations and plans in a biodiversity-rich region that has been notified as a national park.

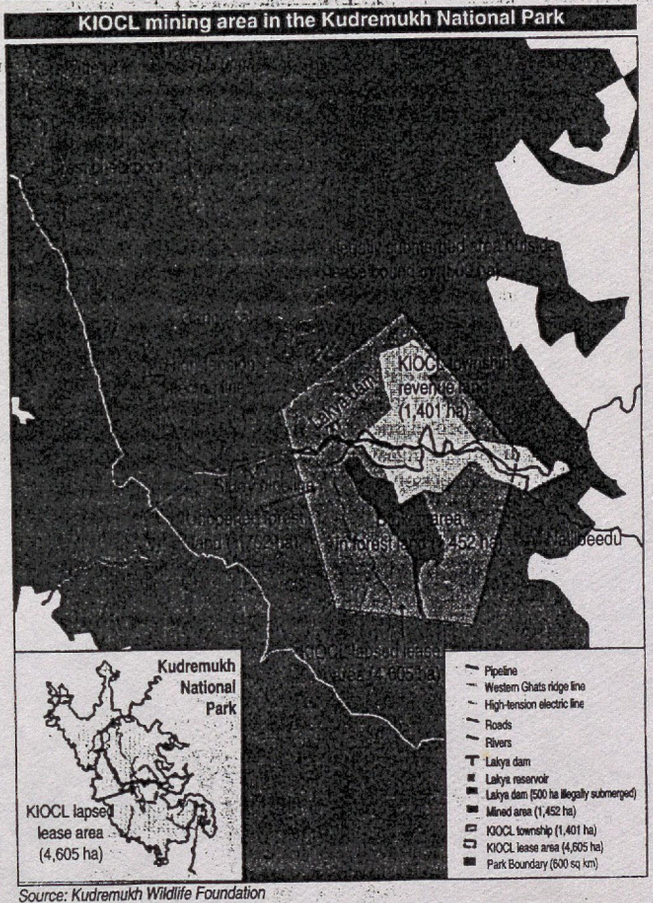


On the Aroli-Gangamoola range, an area mined by KIOCL stands in sharp contrast to the greenery of the Western Ghats in the background, and, at right, the Nellibeedu hills, where KIOCL undertook prospecting in 1996.

Text and pictures:
RAVI SHARMA

AFTER an 11-day break, Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) resumed its mining operations on August 5 in the picturesque hill ranges of Kudremukh, 110 km west of Mangalore in Karnataka. Mining had come to a halt on July 24, when a second temporary working permission granted by the State and Central governments expired. The company has now secured permission to work for three more months on the already broken-up area of 1,452.74 hectares. But this period is going to be suspenseful for its workers and farmers, environmentalists and other sections of society who are concerned about the mining activity. The Supreme Court is expected to issue soon its verdict on a petition seeking a ban on mining in Kudremukh, which could change the destiny of the Rs.1,200-crore, profit-making public sector company.

KIOCL mining area in the Kudremukh National Park



Source: Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation

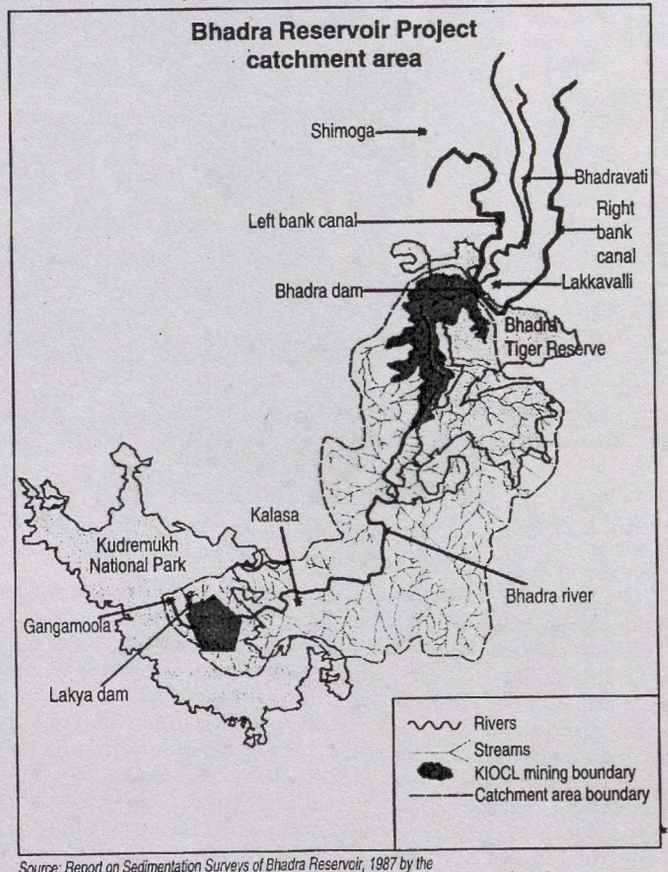
KIOCL has been conducting its operations on an area of 4,604.55 ha for over 20 years. Opposition to its activities has built up over the years – from environmentalists and wildlife conservationists who are concerned about the threat to the region's flora and fauna, and farmers who are affected by the pollution of the streams that originate in the mining area. The campaign for a ban on mining gained strength with the support of conservation scientists such as Ullas Karanth and literary personalities such as U.R. Ananthamurthy and K.P. Poornachandra Tejasvi. The company made some efforts to contain pollution but a combination of factors such as problems associated with open-cast mining, the steep terrain, the loose soil and heavy rainfall defeated them.

Farmers living in down-



stream villages told *Frontline* that the paddy yield had declined from 50 quintals to 30 quintals a hectare because of the accumulation of silt and waste tailings in the fields. Said a farmer of Nellibeedu: "Every monsoon the water brings with it silt and tailings. These solidify and harden in summer. Nothing grows on the field." The tailings rendered the sand unfit even for construction purposes, they complained.

A team of experts from the Centre for Ecological Sciences of the Indian Institute of Science (IISc.), Bangalore made a study of the 'Impact of Iron Ore Mining on the Flora and Fauna of Kudremukh National Park and Environs'. Its leader R. Sukumar said: "When the decision to locate the mine at Kudremukh was taken in the early 1970s, the effects and consequences of habitat fragmentation and bio-



Source: Report on Sedimentation Surveys of Bhadra Reservoir, 1987 by the Karnataka Engineering Research Station, Krishnarajasagar.

diversity loss were poorly understood. It is time we considered the impact of ongoing and future mining in the region in the light of new scientific knowledge. It is now well known that habitat fragmentation is the single largest threat to biodiversity and biological integrity."

The study was commissioned by the State Forest Department. The report, which was submitted in January 2001, says: "Open-cast mining by its very nature is a very destructive activity that causes virtually irreparable damage." It notes that the mining areas that have been abandoned, leave alone those where mining is on, stand in stark contrast to the adjoining natural grasslands and forests. It points out that the situation has been aggravated by the high rainfall. The mining and associated activities have resulted in the loss of habitat and the fragmenta-

tion of the otherwise contiguous block of tropical moist forest and grasslands in the Western Ghats. In the mining area, biodiversity is at a low level. Although several species of grass and herbs have sprung up in areas abandoned after mining, they are insufficient to stabilise the broken soil.

Problems such as turgidity of the water downstream, sedimentation and siltation were not within the scope of the study. Farmers complain that mining has deforested the upper reaches of the hills, resulting in an increased flow of silt and iron ore tailings down the streams. The silt and tailings are either deposited in the fields or carried to the Bhadra reservoir. Environmentalists say that sedimentation could reduce the life span of the reservoir, which is designed to last 180 years. There have been no studies on the effects of siltation. Even a long-term study by the Nagpur-based National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) has not examined samples of the water taken during the monsoon when the silt load is high.

Said Sukumar: "When we started field work in August 2000 the peak monsoon had already passed and mining had also been stopped because of a leak in the slurry pipe. The level of dissolved iron in the water was all right. A round-the-year study to gather data on aspects such as silt loads at various points along the river, the difference in silt loads before and after the mining areas, and the rate of siltation of the downstream reservoir will have to be undertaken if a proper assessment is to be made."



Accumulated ore tailings on the edge of the Lakya reservoir (facing page). KIOCL's future operations depend also on the dam's capacity to take more tailings.

Jagadish Krishnaswamy, a hydrologist, said: "The topography and rainfall characteristics, in combination with the open-cast mining, road-building and other land-surface disturbances caused by KIOCL operations, are likely to lead to high sediment discharges in the Bhadra river system in the short and long term. But curiously, one of the glaring drawbacks of the studies conducted in the region has been the poor attention given to water quality and the omission of wet-season sampling of streams."

Environmentalists say that KIOCL's measures to check pollution have had very little impact. However, the company does not agree with this assessment. Admitting that the mining has caused pollution, it says it has been able to keep the level of pollution to the minimum. Officials of KIOCL give a list of anti-pollution measures they have undertaken. According to them, the company has constructed two rock-fill check-dams and a series of check-bunds in the small valleys to prevent the wash-off from mine faces and mine roads from reaching the Bhadra river during the monsoon. It has also built a 100-metre dam across the Lakya, a tributary of the Bhadra, into which the waste tailings in the form of slurry are discharged. An underground pipeline has been laid to carry the slurry concentrate from the Kudremukh plant to the pelletisation plant at Mangalore and the New Mangalore Port, to be shipped abroad. It has also planted 75 lakh trees as part of an afforestation programme.

One of the major problems faced by KIOCL is the disposal of waste tailings. They have to be either disposed of or permanently stored to prevent them from being carried off into the river by rainwater. The dam across the Lakya breached once, in 1992. According to KIOCL, the dam can take six to nine million tonnes



more of tailings if its height is increased by one metre. The report of the IISc. team calls for a detailed study of the structural stability of the dam if KIOCL plans to store tailings permanently in it. But the company has sought the government's permission to build another dam (Kachige Holey) after the one across the Lakya is filled. The Lakya dam has submerged 572 ha of shola forests and a new dam could submerge more areas.

As part of its compensatory afforestation programme, KIOCL has planted about eight million saplings of eucalyptus and Accacia auriculiformis over 800 ha of grasslands. Company officials proudly display satellite images from the National Remote Sensing Agency, Hyderabad, that show that there has been a net positive development in the area leased out to KIOCL over the past 23 years. Almost the entire lot of trees, planted on the advice of the Forest Department, are in areas that have not been mined. The mined areas are still shorn of all vegetation.

The IISc. report disputes the company's claims regarding afforestation. The company, it says, has termed the grasslands wastelands and planted exotic species there. According to Sukumar, the grasslands are certainly not wastelands. "The montane grasslands of the Western Ghats have now been shown to be natural high-altitude grasslands. They have their unique complement of plant and animal life that needs to be preserved. Even while recognising that the grasslands at Kudremukh occur at lower altitudes and that this could be partly because of anthropogenic disturbances in the historical past, there is no biological justification for converting these grasslands into plantations of exotics."

He argues that the introduction of exotic species, which are fast-growing, hardy and resistant to climatic factors, would have undesirable long-term effects on the grasslands and the adjoining shola forests.

Although environmentalists have commended KIOCL for planting seedlings of a large number of native evergreen species even in the abandoned areas, the IISc. report says that this appreciation is misplaced. According to the report, the first step in the direction of stabilising the soil is to grow herbaceous plants.

THE Central and State governments have gone out of their way to help KIOCL. In September 1987, the Government of Karnataka declared its intention to convert the area into a national park under Section 35(1) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. According to a notification dated June 16, 2001, the State government, "after waiting out the period for preferring claims and (after) all claims had been inquired", notified an area of 56,328.798 ha as constituting the Kudremukh National Park (KNP) under Section 35(4) of the Act. It is the largest tropical wet evergreen forest in Karnataka to be declared a protected area. The notification, however, excluded from the proposed park 3,703.55 ha in the South Bhadra forests; of this, 3,203.55 ha has been leased to KIOCL and the remaining 500 ha was submerged when the company increased the height of the Lakya dam in 1994. The decision to exclude 3,703.55 ha was questioned by Forest Department officials, including Madhu Sharma, Deputy Conservator of Forests (DCF), Chikmagalur, and S.K. Chakrabarti, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), in July 2000 when it was first brought to their notice. The Law Department overruled their objections.

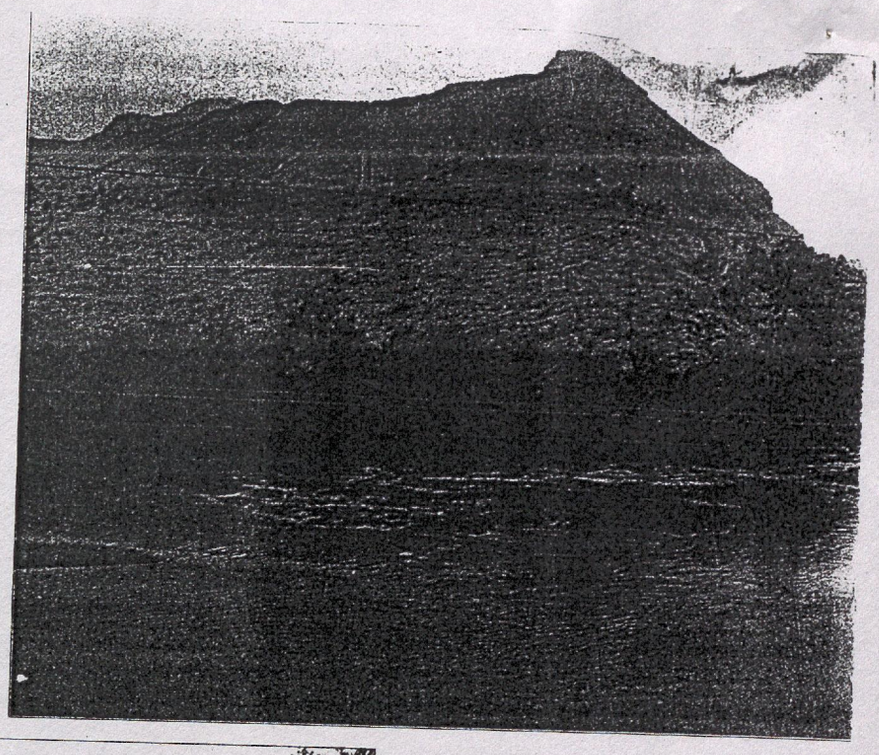
According to informed sources, the settlement officer of the Revenue Department – of the rank of Assistant Commissioner (A.C.) – interpreted the Wildlife (Protection) Act in such a way as to mean that he could leave out areas of reserved forest without consulting the Forest Department. But in reality he had authority over only revenue or *patta* land, and not forest land. The State government went by the settlement officer's recommendation.

The sources said that the A.C. kept the Forest Department in the dark about the wrong interpretation and that it was only in July 2000 that the DCF, Chikmagalur, heard about the State government's intention to leave certain areas out of the KNP and its communication to the Union government in this regard. One informed source said: "The DCF unilaterally filed objections stating that the A.C. had exceeded his powers and approached the Deputy Commissioner (D.C.), Chikmagalur, asking for a copy of the A.C.'s report. The D.C. then asked her to give a para-wise comment on the A.C.'s report. By October 2000 she had submitted her remarks, which included the recommendation that the 3,703.55 ha should not be left out of the area of the park. The D.C. and the then Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) concurred with her views. Their views were sent to the Union Ministry of

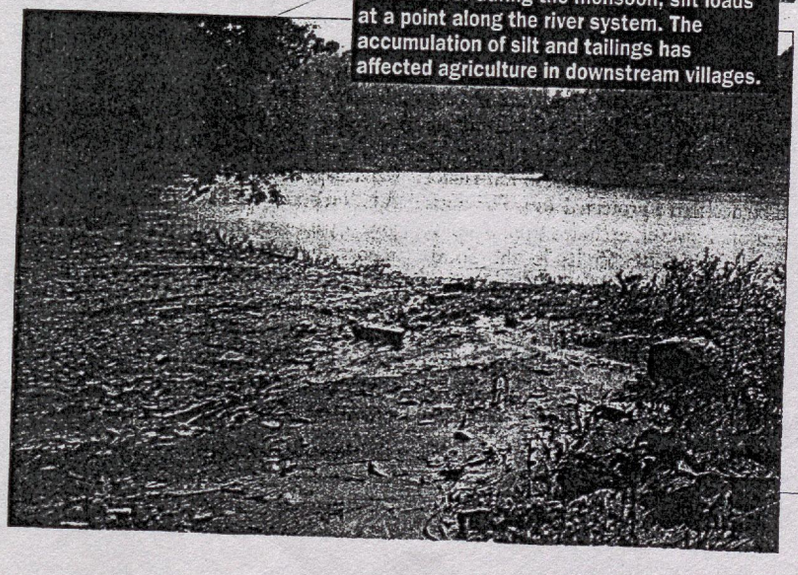
Environment and Forests (MoEF)."

The State Law Department initially went along with the reports of the DCF and the D.C. In fact, it even praised the DCF. But, after a long silence, the State government wrote to the MoEF stating that it excluded certain areas from the KNP. According to informed sources, the DCF's objection was based on the fact that the areas sought to be excluded had been notified as a reserved forest after the settlement of all rights even before its inclusion in the 1987 notification regarding the KNP. No rights could have accrued thereafter, they said. Also, the Supreme Court ruled in 1996 that except in exceptional circumstances no forest land could be excluded at the time of notification after the intention to notify it had been declared.

Officials of the MoEF did not support the views of the DCF and the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife). A senior official is said to have remarked that







A dam to check the wash-off from mine faces and mine roads from reaching the Bhadra river during the monsoon; silt loads at a point along the river system. The accumulation of silt and tailings has affected agriculture in downstream villages.

RAVI SHARMA

ALTHOUGH P. Sampath Iyengar, a renowned geologist in the princely state of Mysore, discovered iron ore deposits in Kudremukh in 1913, full-scale mining operations began only in 1980.

In the 1960s, the National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) undertook preliminary prospecting and investigation. It acquired a lease to mine in an area of 5,218 hectares, which included parts of the Aroli and Nellibeedu hills. With an iron content of 33 to 38 per cent, the ore was of a low quality, and the extraction process involved huge investments. The NMDC (with a 51 per cent equity) entered into a joint venture with MARCONA of the United States (25 per cent equity) and the MON Group of Japan (24 per cent) in 1969. Although a pilot plant was set up at a cost of Rs.48 lakhs, the foreign collaborators pulled out owing to procedural delays, and the project was shelved.

Interest in the iron ore deposits was revived in 1974 when the Iranian government signed with the Government of India an agreement for a buy-back arrangement for the finished product from Kudremukh. Under the agreement, Iran would finance the project to the tune of $630 million on condition that there would be no cost and time overruns. As a result, the 100 per cent



The Bhadra, its waters near-pristine before it enters the mining area, and turgid as it leaves the area.

Rich in resources

export-oriented Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) was established as a public sector company under the Ministry of Steel and Mines in April 1976, in order to develop mines and plant facilities to produce 7.5 million tonnes of iron ore concentrate per annum from low-grade magnetite as a tailor-made product for the National Iranian Steel Mills. But Iranian funding stopped with the overthrow of the Shah in 1979 and the subsequent political crisis in that country. Although the Government of India stepped in to fund the project, Iran was not ready to fulfil its contractual obligations and lift the ore. And though KIOCL was ready to ship iron ore by September 1980, it had no buyers.

The company got a new lease of life when India entered into a barter deal with Romania. Under the deal, KIOCL would supply one million tonnes of ore concentrate in return for Romanian equipment to set up a pelletisation plant in Mangalore with a capacity of three million tonnes a year. Although KIOCL's installed capacity was derated to 6.8 million tonnes a year in the wake of the Iranian crisis and later to 5.7 million tonnes in an attempt to extend the life of the ore body, the company was able to break into the Japanese market after 1986 and the Chinese market a few years later.

KIOCL, which has 2,390 employees (another 10,000 persons are indirectly employed), had a turnover of Rs.538 crores in 2000-01 and earned $127 million in foreign exchange. It commissioned a Rs.450-crore pig iron and ductile iron spun pipe project in Mangalore in February, signed an agreement with Mineral Technologies of Australia to recover iron tailings from the Lakya dam; and has plans to invest up to Rs.600 crores in a coke oven plant in Karwar and an iron ore mining project in Ongole, Andhra Pradesh, during the Ninth Plan. The company is a major contributor of business at the New Mangalore Port but environmentalists say that the port earns only 10.5 per cent of its total revenue from KIOCL.

According to K. Gurumurthy, Director (Production and Projects), KIOCL, with its present capacity of 5.7 million tonnes a year it can continue to mine economically for another six years. Although it has got permission to mine for three more months, the company has put almost all its plans on hold. S. Murari, Chairman-cum-Managing Director, said: "The uncertainty over whether we will get a lease has meant that we have been unable to make capital investments."

Environmentalists say that KIOCL has only itself to blame for the crisis. Said a wildlife enthusiast: "The company failed to move with the times. After the strengthening of the forest conservation laws, mining in a reserved forest, which was to be notified as a national park, was bound to attract attention from Green groups."

In 1994, the State government asked KIOCL to look for ore elsewhere. In 1996, mining at Kudremukh came to a standstill for three days after the Supreme Court ruled that there could be no non-forestry activity in areas that had been declared national parks. However, mining resumed after the court issued a clarification, stating that the order would not affect those who had secured a lease before the implementation of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. But it had also made it clear that in such cases the lease should not be renewed. KIOCL's lease expired in July 1999. Environmentalists point out that KIOCL went ahead with huge capital investments though it knew that it would be difficult to secure a new lease.

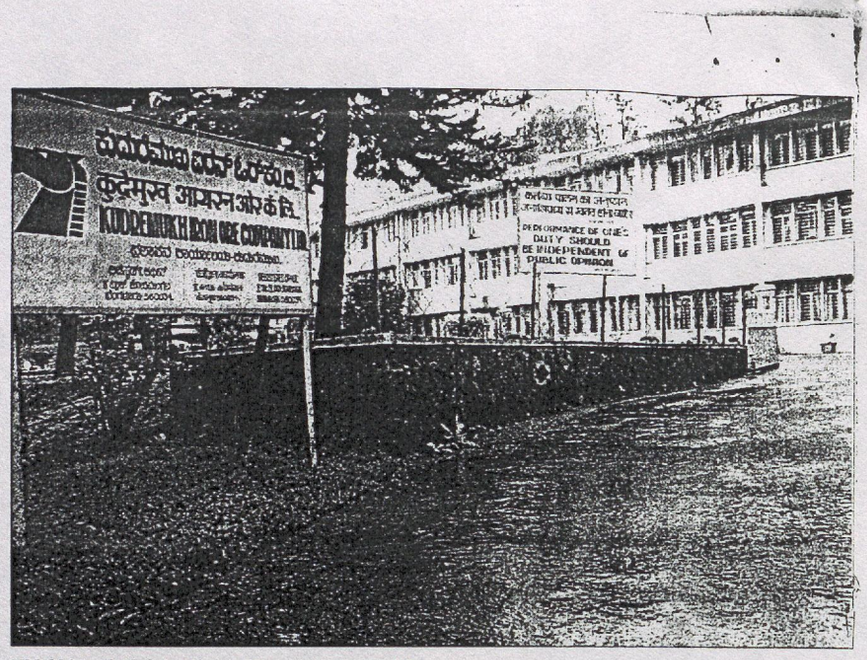
KUDREMUKH, which means in Kannada the face of a horse, derives its name from a 1,892-metre peak in the region. It has been identified as one of the 18 'hot spots' of global biodiversity, and is part of Global 200 identified by the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) for concentrated conservation efforts. Kudremukh is a region with heavy rainfall – an annual average of 6,500 mm, most of which occurs in the monsoon months of June to September. ■

the MoEF did not receive their reports. According to informed sources, high-ranking MoEF officials maintained that the State government did have the power to exclude specified forest areas from the KNP. In support of their claim, the sources showed letters written by a senior official in the Prime Minister's Office suggesting that the areas being mined by KIOCL be excluded from the KNP, that permission be granted expeditiously to the company to mine in the area and that more areas be handed over to it for mining.

A letter (8-69/99 – FC, dated 25-7-2000) written by Rajiv Kumar Gupta, Assistant Inspector-General of Forests, MoEF, to the Secretary (Forests), Government of Karnataka, in response to the State government's request for the renewal of mining lease to KIOCL, also makes it clear that MoEF officials were aware of the State government's decision to exclude 3,703.55 ha from the KNP. It says: "I am directed to refer to your letter No FEE 41 FFM 98, dated 18-7-2000, communicating to this Ministry the decision of the State government to exclude 4,605 ha of area including the broken up area of KIOCL from the (Kudremukh) National Park on the basis of the report of the A.C., Chikmagalur – the Settlement Officer appointed under Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. The Ministry (MoEF) also took note of the request of the State government for renewal of mining lease over already broken up area of 1,452.74 ha and 92.68 ha of additional land to be broken afresh along with extension of temporary working permission by another year for mining in favour of KIOCL."

The letter also states that the State government's request had been examined holistically, keeping in mind that "the present notification of the KNP is only a notification of intent", that "the State government has clearly communicated its decision to exclude the proposed area from the purview of the National Park" and that "the decision (to do so) was based on the report of the settlement officer appointed by the State government under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972".

The MoEF even issued a year's temporary working permission to KIOCL on the basis of the Karnataka government's submission that the area concerned would not form part of the area to be notified as a national park. The permission was subject to the State government issuing a notification on the constitution of the KNP by September 30, 2000 (which it did in June 2001) and the completion of the environmental impact assessment report within six months (which it did by January 2001).



KIOCL's administrative office at Kudremukh.

Curiously, a year later, the MoEF has made an about-turn. The change in its stand became known in the course of legal proceedings in connection with KIOCL.

Wildlife First, a non-governmental organisation (NGO), filed an interlocutory application in the Supreme Court in May 2001 seeking a ban on mining in Kudremukh. The application said that the mining was illegal and violative of the court's orders on December 12, 1996 on a writ petition, banning non-forestry activity in forests, and on an interlocutory application dated February 14, 2000, prohibiting the removal of even dead and dying trees and grass from national parks and sanctuaries. The NGO's application, which was filed through the *amicus curiae* Harish Salve, also challenged the granting of temporary working permission to KIOCL by the MoEF twice (in July 1999 and July 2000) under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, on the grounds that there were no provisions under the Act to grant such permission. The *amicus curiae* has questioned the validity of the decision to leave certain areas out of the KNP.

On May 10, a three-member Bench ordered issue of notices to the three respondents, the Union of India, the Government of Karnataka and KIOCL, directing them to file affidavits.

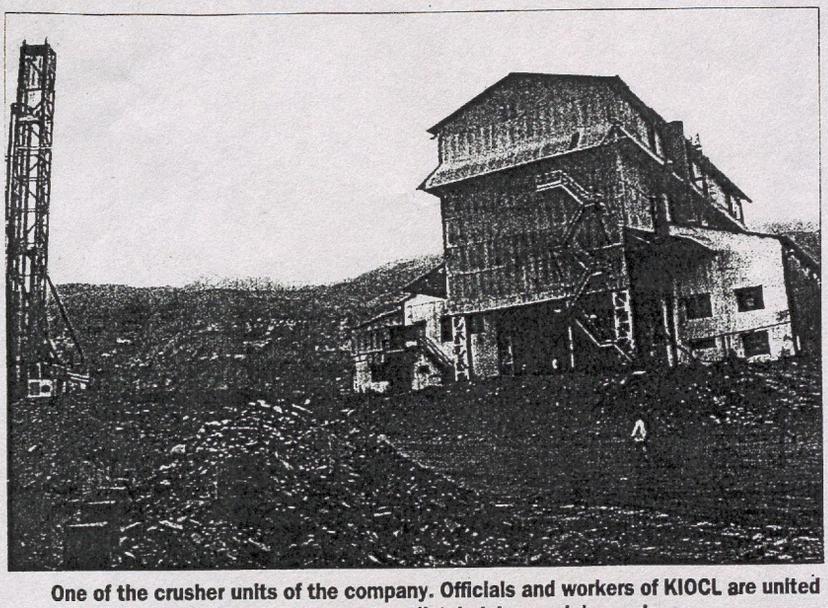
The Supreme Court directed the Union government to file "an affidavit within eight weeks and in the affidavit also state the reasons as to why Government of India having once notified the area as a national park, then permitted mining activity to be carried out notwithstanding".

An additional affidavit, filed on July 26 by S.C. Sharma, Additional Director-General of Forests (Wildlife), MoEF, said that the MoEF opposed the Karnataka government's decision to leave 3,703.55 ha out of the KNP. It stated that "after careful consideration of the entire issue including ecological importance of the Kudremukh ranges, effect of mining on flora and fauna, area already broken up by KIOCL, alternatives available, etc, the Ministry (was) of the view that it is not desirable to permanently allow mining operations to continue in (Kudremukh) especially in the unbroken area." Further, it stated that "no approval under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 would be accorded to KIOCL for undertaking mining operations in any unbroken areas".

With regard to the areas already being mined, the affidavit stated that in view of KIOCL's heavy investment in the area, the employment prospects of a large number of persons and export commitments, the MoEF "was considering to allow KIOCL to continue mining operations over the already broken up forest area" for up to five years.

After hearing the submissions of Sharma and the *amicus curiae* on July 27, the Supreme Court gave three weeks to counsel for the State of Karnataka and KIOCL. It ruled that Karnataka government should consider afresh the notification excluding forest areas from the KNP. While Sharma's affidavit has made KIOCL officials nervous, environmentalists are elated by the latest stand of the MoEF.

According to informed sources, the stand of the State government will be that:



One of the crusher units of the company. Officials and workers of KIOCL are united in their opposition to the environmentalists' claims and demands.

a. The non-mined forest areas (2,251 ha), which have been leased to KIOCL, should be designated as a buffer zone for the KNP, where human habitation and grazing of cattle would be allowed;

b. Subject to the capacity of the Lakya dam to take waste tailings, KIOCL should be allowed to mine for seven more years. There should not be any immediate stoppage of work because it will cause problems; for instance, the problem of maintaining the mining faces and the Lakya dam, which might come crashing down the valleys below; and

c. Round-the-season studies will be undertaken by a committee comprising representatives of KIOCL, environmentalists, Forest Department officials, hydrological experts, conservation scientists, and so on.

Reacting to the MoEF affidavit, Karnataka Forest Department officials said that it was time the Union Ministry stopped adopting a holier-than-thou attitude. According to them, in July 2000, when KIOCL's temporary lease expired, the MoEF sought the State government's view as to whether mining should continue and said that if the State government was for the continuation of mining it would be better to leave out of the KNP the area in which KIOCL operated since mining was not expected to take place in a national park. "Today they are not only pretending that they knew nothing but are also trying to be the only ones concerned about the forests and the KNP. And we are depicted as the villainous lot," they said.

The Forest Department has also not applied rules consistently. For example, in 1994-96 KIOCL was given a licence for prospecting in the Nellibeedu hill, which is estimated to have around 54 million tonnes of ore. Officials of KIOCL themselves wonder under what clause the Department gave them a prospecting licence. Under the Forest (Conservation) Act, prospecting cannot be done in a reserved forest. Environmentalists have accused KIOCL of damaging forests on the Nellibeedu hills by constructing roads and drilling borewells.

According to an official in the State Forest Department, the Government of India has to choose between bad development and good environment. The official explained: "KIOCL is a public sector profit-making company which provides employment. And the mines have proximity to the Mangalore port. But what about the environment and forest laws? Should mining be allowed inside a national park? If so, then let the government say so or exempt KIOCL from the laws."

According to the official, the bottomline is that the mines have to be moved out, for two simple reasons. "First, as per the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, mining can be allowed in a reserve forest subject to the prior approval of the MoEF and the State Forest Department (forest is a subject in the Concurrent List). Generally, the MoEF has not renewed mining leases in the Western Ghats. Now that the MoEF has in its July 27 affidavit asked the Karnataka government to reconsider its decision to leave out the forests where KIOCL is operating, from the KNP (and designating it as part of KNP), it will be difficult for the MoEF to grant permission."

The official said that the ball is now in the court of the two governments. "Permission for mining cannot be accorded in a national park. Secondly, KIOCL has made no efforts all these years to offer to the Forest Department as per the above Act, land/money in compensation for compulsory forestation in lieu of the area that it has been mining on."

The company does not see it that way. Its officials and workers are united in their opposition to the environmentalists' claims and demands. Closure of the mines would mean hardship for a vast majority of workers, and alternative plans like moving the mining operations to Sandur (in Bellary district, Karnataka) or Ongole (Andhra Pradesh) do not appear to be practical. While a section of the workforce can be accommodated in Mangalore, a question mark hangs over the rest. Knowledgeable sources pointed out that KIOCL, which has a Plan outlay of Rs.1,200 crores, will need Rs.3,000 crores to shift its operations to another area.

The employees of KIOCL are an agitated lot. Appeals have been sent to the Prime Minister and some of his Cabinet colleagues. They have also submitted a memorandum to State Chief Minister S.M. Krishna, who they claimed had assured them that their interests would be protected. The workers say that with nearly 75 per cent of them being above the age of 45 years, it would be difficult to acquire new skills.

Said B.M. Narayanappa, organising secretary, Kudremukh Shrama Shakti Sangatan, one of the three trade unions and currently the recognised one: "We want the government to give us a 20-year lease. If our appeals fail we will undertake hunger strikes along with our family members." Only 95 employees have availed themselves of the voluntary retirement package offered by the management in March and June 2000.

Environmentalists are not perturbed by the extension of mining permission for three more months. Although they would like to see mining to "stop tomorrow", they appear to be practical enough to suggest a five-year time-frame for the closure of operations.

Although KIOCL management has publicly stated that it would like to continue its operations for 20 more years, company officials privately admit that they would be just as happy if the company is allowed to function until the present ore body is mined, that is, for six or seven years. ■

Chandre Gowda comes to KIOCL's defence

By Our Correspondent

CHIKMAGALUR, APRIL 5. The Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, Mr. D.B.Chandre Gowda, has said that people opposing the mining operations by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) should be invited to the area to ascertain the facts.

Speaking at the silver jubilee celebrations of the company at Kudremukh, he criticised those who had no idea of the conditions prevailing in the area filing PILs (public interest litigation) in the name of protecting ecology. Their intentions were questionable, he said.

Coming out strongly in defence of the KIOCL, Mr. Gowda poohpoohed the charge that the mining operations were polluting the Bhadra. That no harm had come to the fish in the river proved that the charge was false.

KIOCL set to break new ground

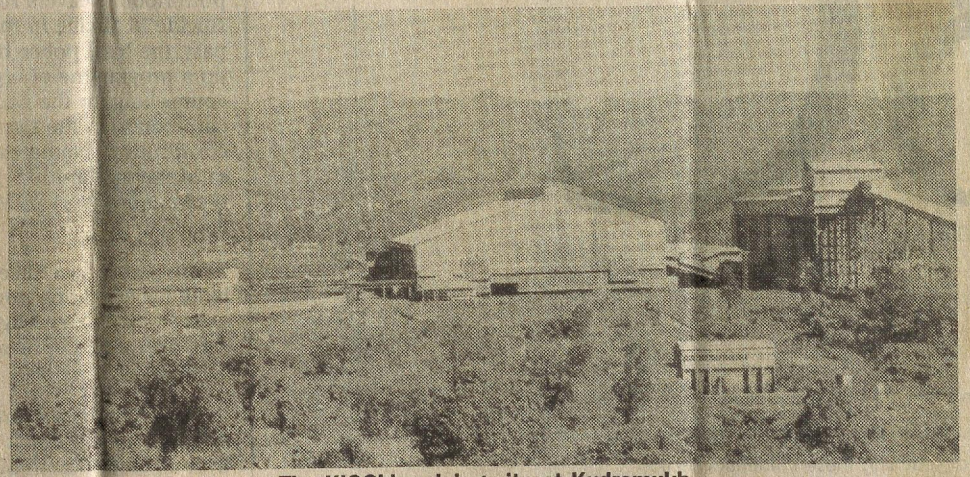
By M.Raghuram

MANGALORE, APRIL 12. The Kudremukh Iron and Steel Company Limited (KIOCL) is set to break new ground by stepping up its expansion. It has set up a Rs. 300- crore iron ore production centre at Ongole in Prakasam District of Andhra Pradesh in its silver jubilee year.

The KIOCL has a good record of financial results and its exports have been on the rise despite the low grade (36-38 percent) ore available at Kudremukh.

The run-up to the KIOCL project started in 1913 when the Iron Man of Mysore regency, Sampath Iyengar, discovered rich deposits of iron ore in Aroli Gangamoola range of the Western Ghats. His studies showed that the adjacent range in Gangrikal and Nellibeedu also had similar reserves. The actual mining was supposed to have been taken up under the funding of Marcona of U.S. and the Mon group of Japan. But after the final pilot project, the proposal was shelved.

Later, under an agreement, the Government of Iran, which evinced interest in the project, paid $ 630 million for setting up a concentration plant at Kudremukh. But half way through, the project suffered a setback because of the political instability in that country. The Government of India completed the plant at Kudremukh and at Mangalore with no cost and time over runs.



The KIOCL's mining site at Kudremukh.

Today, KIOCL, which has received ISO 9002, earns a foreign exchange of $ 150 million a year. It is using earthen technology and has constructed a dam across one of the tributaries of the Bhadra to check the flow of solid waste and to supply water for the project. The company has evolved a monitoring system for water in the reservoir, which acts as a natural filtering mechanism and has been used for the first time in the country.

The other environment-friendly activities taken up by the KIOCL, includes continuous monitoring of air quality in the mining site and planting of 75 lakh trees. It has implemented the agreement signed with the Mangalore University to identify and plant rugged and local varieties of trees in the abandoned areas.

All these steps fetched the KIOCL the prestigious Abheraj Baldote Environment Award from the Federation of Indian Mineral Industries.

Rs. 300-cr. KIOCL project in AP

12/4/2001

By Our Special Correspondent

BANGALORE, APRIL 11. Mr. B.K.Tripathy, Union Minister of State for Steel, will lay the foundation stone for a Rs. 300-crore iron ore project of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) at Ongole in Prakasam District of Andhra Pradesh on Thursday.

The Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Mr. Chandrababu Naidu, will be the chief guest. The project, which heralds a major expansion activity of the KIOCL, is an outcome of a memorandum of understanding between the company and the Andhra Pradesh Government signed at the Partnership Summit held in Hyderabad in January.

KIOCL signs MoU with Centre

BANGALORE, MARCH 22. The Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) on Wednesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Union Ministry of Steel, for the financial year 2001-2002 for producing 5.7 million tonnes of iron ore concentrate and 3.85 million tonnes of pellets.