
[India: Mining and plantations put National Park at risk](#)

The temporary work permit given to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company (KIOCL) to continue the extraction of iron in the Kudremukh National Park, located in the Western Ghats region of the state of Karnataka, has given place to severe criticism from national and international environmental NGOs, which had been putting pressure on the authorities for the company's request to be denied.

KIOCL has been operating in the Aroli and Malleshwara regions of Kudremukh National Park, under a 30-year lease, which expired in July 1999. Since then, the company has been lobbying to obtain a 20-year extension on the lease, but it has only been granted two successive year long temporary permits.

Impacts of mining in the area are apparent. A report of the Indian NGO Environment Support Group (ESG) proves that many fish varieties have disappeared due to pollution, and points out that farmers complain about the decline in agricultural productivity downstream due to deposition of mine tailings. River pollution has provoked an increase in cases of disease among villagers. In 1987 a 67 metre long slurry pipeline broke and its leakage reached the Yennehole River, which led to severe environmental damage.

The only action supposedly undertaken by KIOCL to mitigate the impacts on forests and rivers in the area has been to plant alien trees! The company adduces having implemented a "reforestation" programme by planting 7.5 million acacia, eucalyptus and other alien tree species. If such claims were true it would make things even worse, since the substitution of a portion of forest by a plantation prevents the regeneration of the secondary forest, thereby impoverishing the environment. Both mining and plantations are a direct cause of deforestation. Nevertheless that of Kudremukh constitutes a particular case where both activities combine to destroy the forest.

At present the State Government has ordered an environmental impact study be undertaken before an extension on the lease is granted. However, this is not seen as a sufficient guarantee by local environmentalists. Leo Saldanha from the Environment Support Group says: "I sincerely believe that a systematic public campaign is the most appropriate option to ensure mining ends in Kudremukh. Nothing like the people's will to bend a government that is intent on violating public commitments and the law."

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