

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE

LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 219
TO BE ANSWERED ON 03.02.2025

Rat-hole Coal Mining in Reserved Forests

219. SHRI PRADYUT BORDOLOI:
SHRI ANTO ANTONY:
SHRI JOYANTA BASUMATARY:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Government is aware of the illegal practice of rat-hole coal mining in North Eastern Region;
- (b) if so, the details of action taken after the incident of Dehing Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary and other protected areas and reserve forests in Assam's Tinsukia district;
- (c) the details regarding the number of such mines present in the region and the area of forests that have been affected;
- (d) the steps being taken by the Government to clamp down on these illegal mines and the coal mafia that operates them;
- (e) whether the Government is aware of the number of accidents taking place in these mines and the number of fatalities that have taken place, if so, the details thereof; and
- (f) the measures are being implemented to restore and rehabilitate areas damaged by rat-hole mining?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE
(SHRI KIRTI VARDHAN SINGH)

(a) Rat hole mining is illegal and its prevention and control primarily falls under the purview of the State/District administration. The State/District Administration is mandated to take all necessary action under the extant Acts/Rules/Regulations.

(b) to (d) The Hon'ble National Green Tribunal (Eastern Zone Bench, Kolkata) registered a Suo Motu Case under Original Application No. 48/2023/EZ following the incident of rat-hole mining in the Dehing Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary and other protected areas in Assam's Tinsukia district and passed judgement on 22nd August, 2023. The judgement, inter-alia, directed the Deputy Commissioner, Tinsukia, Assam to ensure that the mines in question are perfectly secured and no rat-hole mining is permitted and access of ordinary persons to the mines is completely barred. The North Eastern Coal Field Limited (NECL) is guarding the area through their own security personnels. The State Government of Assam has taken several actions, inter-alia, drone surveillance, imposition of restrictions under section 144 CrPC, eviction operation and joint patrolling with District Civil Administration and Police and development of border villages to curb the illegal coal mining.

(e) to (f) The State Government took necessary actions to rescue the miners trapped inside rat-hole and also clamp down the illegal rat-hole mining operation after accident in illegal coal Mine at Umrangshu, Assam. Several projects have been implemented for restoration of the environment affected by the rat-hole coal mining which includes providing safe drinking water, treatment of acidic rivers, afforestation works, providing alternate livelihood projects. In addition, creation of plantations, regional wildlife and biodiversity management plan has been prepared for management of area in and around areas operated by Coal India Limited.
