

RELIGION & ECOLOGY

In India, resource-rich areas happen to be sacred places for communities. Of late several development projects have appeared against the wishes of the people

MAHAN (₹6,400 CRORE): Mining of coal from 1,090 hectares of Mahan Coal Block in Singrauli district to fuel power plants of Essar and Hindalco

Religious concern: Mahan Coal Block under dense forest cover. The forest is believed to be the abode of god Dih Baba

Ecological concerns: Forest would be lost. Since the forest is in the catchment area of the Rihand reservoir, mining would affect water resources

Current status: In-principle clearance has been granted

KHANDADHAR HILLS: Several mining firms, including South Korea's POSCO, have been allotted mining leases for iron ore on 0.15 million hectares on hills and forests

Religious concern: The hills and the forests are sacred to tribal groups Pauri Bhuiyan and Junaga. They believe their deity Kandh Kumari resides on the mountaintop. The hills are also home to the sacred Khandadhara waterfall.

Ecological concerns: Tribal rights activists have written to the prime minister demanding scraping of the licences. They allege the mine operated by Kalinga Commercial Corporation Ltd has harmed the ecology of the region

Current status: The Supreme Court has asked the Centre to decide on the proposed mining leases

DHARI DEVI (above ₹3,200 CRORE): Expansion of Shrinagar Hydro-Electric Project by Alaknanda Hydro Power Co, a subsidiary of infra major GVK, is underway near Srinagar town

Religious concern: Expansion will submerge ancient Dhari Devi temple, sacred to Hindus. It is believed Adi Shankaracharya had

worshiped on the rock on which the temple is built

Ecological concerns: A committee of the environment ministry said measures such as catchment area treatment were not in place while the project work is nearly complete

Current status: The Supreme Court has reserved its judgement

TASHI DING HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT (above ₹100 CRORE): A 97 MW

project on the Rathong Chu river

Religious concern: Residents and Buddhist monks consider the river and the Yuksom region to be sacred

Ecological concerns: The project is about 10 km away from the Khangchendzonga National Park

Current status: The environment ministry has ordered stopping work on the project

LOWER DEMWE HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT (above ₹12,000 CRORE): A

1,750 MW project on the Lohit river being executed jointly by Athena Demwe and Arunachal Pradesh government

Religious concern: The project is close to the mythological Parshuram Kund, considered sacred by Hindus

Ecological concerns: A committee of the National Board of Wildlife recommended rejection of the project, saying it is a threat to the biodiversity in the Dibru Saikhowa National Park and would submerge the *chapories* (river islands) on the Lohit, which are important bird habitats

Current status: It has been given final forest clearance

NIYAMGIRI (₹5,000

CRORE): Vedanta's Indian arm Sterlite and Odisha Mining Corporation Ltd want to mine bauxite from 660 hectares on the Niyamgiri hill for Vedanta's refinery in nearby Lanjigarh

Religious concern: Niyamgiri hill is sacred to the tribe

Dongria Kondh

Ecological concerns: Company violated environmental laws like the Forest Conservation Act

Current status: Affected gram sabhas to decide whether mining will affect religious rights of tribals

SETHUSAMUDRAM PROJECT (₹29,200 CRORE):

The project aims to create a 167-km long shipping channel that will connect Palk Bay and Gulf Mannar through Palk Strait

Religious concern: Many Hindu

religious groups say the channel would cut across Ram Setu, a bridge believed to be built by Lord Ram to rescue his wife Sita, who was held captive by Lanka (Sri Lanka) ruler Ravana

Ecological concerns: It would

hamper marine life and displace 1.5 million fisherfolk

Current status: There has been a stay on dredging since 2009. The matter is under the consideration of the Supreme Court