



Death traps

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Death traps-The Meghalaya government must urgently ensure that all illegal mines are shut down

- The tardy response of the Centre and the State of Meghalaya to the plight of at least 15 workers trapped in a rat-hole coal mine since mid-December has exposed the extraordinary indifference in government to labour welfare and the law.
- The primary responsibility for the operation of illegal mines lies with the State government, and it should be called to account for ignoring the directions of the National Green Tribunal to close them and levy punitive royalties on those that extracted the coal.
- Several appeals are before the Supreme Court in connection with a ban ordered by the Tribunal on rat-hole mining and the transport of already mined coal.
- It is the responsibility of the Centre and the State to rehabilitate the workers from impoverished communities, reportedly including some child labourers, who are ready to undertake the risky labour because of the higher-than-average wages paid.
- If illegal mines continue to operate in flagrant violation of rules under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, the responsibility lies with the State government.
- As recently as in December, Parliament was informed that 22 States had constituted a task force to review illegal mining and act on it, but Meghalaya does not figure in that list.

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