



# **WILDLIFE FIRST!**

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14<sup>th</sup> July 2000

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee

Hon Prime Minister

Office of the Prime Minister

South Block, New Delhi 110 001

Honourable Prime Minister

**Sub: Appeal to stop grant of mining lease to Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) in Kudremukh National Park, Karnataka.**

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We learn from reliable sources that a letter from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has been sent to the Chief Secretary, Government of Karnataka requesting that the mining lease of Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) which has expired on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1999 be renewed for a period of 20 years w.e.f from that date. The grant of Prospecting license for Gangrikal deposits and a new mining lease for Nellibeedu deposits, which are unopened areas of Kudremukh National Park, has also been requested. To allow these activities, which clearly violate Wildlife and Forest laws, the letter has asked for denotification of some areas of Kudremukh National Park.

It is shocking to learn of this retrograde move by the PMO and this memorandum is being submitted by concerned Wildlife Conservation Groups and individuals appealing for your urgent intervention.

We would like to bring to your kind notice the following facts and the reasons as to why we oppose the extension of the mining lease and prospecting license to KIOCL :

### **Ecological Facts**

1. National Parks constitute a mere 1% of India's land area, where intact assemblages of several endangered species have the best chance of long term survival in the wild. Kudremukh National Park is the largest wildlife protected area of a wet evergreen shola type of forest in the fragile Western Ghats. The Western Ghats, of which the Kudremukh National Park is a part, is assessed to be one of the twenty-five hotspots identified for bio-diversity conservation in the world. Habitat fragmentation is one of the biggest threats to the survival of several endangered species and Kudremukh is one of the last compact tracts of climax forest remaining in the Western Ghats.
2. KNP supports three large mammal predator species - Tiger, Leopard and Wild Dog. It also has a diverse assemblage of large mammals like Gaur, Sambar, Wild Pig, Muntjac, Chevrotain, Bonnet Macaque, Common Langur and the Lion Tailed Macaque, most of which are listed in International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) -endangered/ threatened species list. This area has also been identified as one of the High priority areas in the world for



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conservation of Tigers by renowned international organizations like Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF), which further reiterates the importance of this area for wildlife conservation

## **Reasons for opposing the extension of mining by KIOCL**

1. It is often made out that every public action to protect bio-diversity and environment is branded as anti-development. We would like to strongly argue, that in the present case, biodiversity rich landscapes like Kudremukh National Park which form less than 1% of India's landscape should not be sacrificed at the altar of economic development. These fragile landscapes are to be viewed as 'Sacred Groves' considering their enormous biological and monetary value and the crucial role these landscapes play in supporting future biotechnology options and for stabilizing climate, soil and water resources. Merely looking at it as an area bearing an abundant and widely available mineral like iron ore and allowing the continuation of mining which has been going on for the last 25 years with minimal economic gain would surely be an extremely shortsighted policy our country can ill afford to adopt.
2. The National Wildlife Policy and the National Forest Policy have highlighted the ecological importance of protecting Forests, which are also crucial watersheds, and outlined appropriate land use strategies. The National Conservation Strategy and Policy Statement on Environment and Development has set an agenda for action that includes the '**correct siting**' of development projects to minimise adverse environmental consequences. KIOCL's mining operations represents a classic case of '**improper siting**' of a development project. If the mining lease is renewed, a unique opportunity to rectify past mistakes of 'improper siting' would be lost. Such a decision would also be completely against the grain of the approved National Policy and agenda, which has evolved after extensive debate and consultations involving Central/State governments, experts and NGOs.
3. Three major rivers Tunga, Bhadra and Netravathi originate in Kudremukh National Park. If this sensitive area is not protected from the ravages of mining, the destruction of the three rivers is certain and will ultimately result in a huge ecological catastrophe. It is also in the National interest that this important catchment area be protected considering the fact that close to thousand crore rupees of public money has been invested on the Bhadra and Tungabhadra river valley projects. These projects with thousands of hectares of command area would suffer irreversible and severe damage with the destruction of the River source itself. The livelihood of millions of people, who are dependent on these river waters for drinking and irrigation will be seriously threatened.
4. KIOCL has violated several conditions imposed by Government of Karnataka while prospecting for iron-ore at Nellibeedu. Roads have been formed, pits have been left open and tree/forest growth has been damaged in violation of the Prospecting licence conditions of Government of Karnataka. KIOCL has, in gross violation of the law, raised the height of the Lakya Dam which has submerged additional areas of the National Park and proceedings in this regard have been initiated by the Forest Department. KIOCL has again been



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booked by the Karnataka Forest Department (KFD) for damaging forest while doubling the width of the existing pipeline tracts inside the National Park, violating the conditions of the permission and before the renewal of the lapsed mining lease. Further, KIOCL has blatantly violated all the pollution norms by releasing mine wash (tailings) to the river Bhadra which can be seen on the banks of the river Bhadra downstream right up to the dam at Lakkavalli and beyond. The sand from the banks of the river Bhadra 15km downstream from the mine was found to be 57% magnetic when tested in a laboratory. This amply proves the enormous destruction being caused by the mining operations of KIOCL and the brazen violations of law and lease/license conditions imposed by the government.

Apart from these arguments, we would also like to bring to your kind notice the correct legal position vis-à-vis the Wildlife Protection Act in respect of allowing mining inside a National Park.

The Wildlife Protection Act clearly prohibits any kind of destruction of wildlife (which includes habitat) inside a National Park unless such destruction benefits wildlife. The arguments already put forth amply prove that mining by KIOCL would certainly not benefit wildlife and clearly violates the law. This being the case, we learn that the PMO is pressurising the State Government to denotify all the areas of Kudremukh National Park that KIOCL needs including pristine unopened areas. Hon Prime Minister, surely such pressure to circumvent the law from your high office is shocking and needs your immediate intervention.

Based on the above facts and reasons, we sincerely appeal to you to intervene and issue clear directives to the Ministries of Steel and Mines to unconditionally reject the application for renewal of the lapsed mining lease of KIOCL and the grant of any new area like Nellibeedu and Gangrikal for either mining or prospecting. We also request you to direct the Ministry of Environment and Forests not to grant any approval under the Forest Conservation Act or issue any Temporary Work Permits. Finally, we urge you to advice the Government of Karnataka to go ahead with the final notification of Kudremukh National Park by including all the areas held by KIOCL under the lapsed mining lease.

Thank you for your urgent consideration

Sincerely

For Wildlife First !

K.M.Chinnappa  
President

K.R. Sethna  
Former Member, Indian Board for Wildlife



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