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## 'Politicians should be educated about conservation'

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*Union environment and forests minister Jairam Ramesh's decision to stop a mining project in Orissa is significant for Karnataka where mining is rampant. Speaking to DNA, former pollution control board chairman HC Sharatchandra said the state government should strictly review mining in the state as many forest areas have become susceptible to environmental damage.*

### Your comments on the present mining status in Karnataka

**Presently, mining is haphazard and there seems to be no control on the activities.**

People think Bellary has no forest area, but there are climax forests which are suitable to Bellary alone. As early as 1986, a report on Bellary, Hospet and Sandur was prepared and it was then predicted that if not properly regulated, there will be lot of damage. This is what we are seeing now. It is unfortunate to see the damages that will take place in Bellary and Koppal because of the iron plants. I had earlier given clearance to only those projects that abided by the condition of carrying out a 'carrying capacity report' of the area. Now all this is not being considered.

### How should the government monitor illegal activities of mining companies?

It is a matter of shame that on the one hand the government is saying that there is illegal mining taking place and on the other hand, it has not taken any steps to stop it. It is also difficult to accept that iron ore from Bellary went to Karwar and then was exported without any check.

It travelled through districts and checkpoints of various departments including sales tax, forest department and mines and geology. This cannot happen unless top government

officials are hand-in-glove in this.

Surprisingly, the chief minister has said that there is illegal mining, but hasn't suspended any official. The government needs political will to monitor the acts, after which there is a need for coordination in various departments.

### In what manner should the green activists campaign against mining activities in forests?

It is most unfortunate that any talk of conservation is being treated as anti-development. In case of Gundia, the government created the Western Ghats Task Force headed by a conservationist, while at the same time it illegally inaugurated the Gundia project with members of the task force being present.

We need firm policy decisions and a detailed report on where development should not be allowed.

Politicians need to be first educated on the need for conservation and then follow the law of the land. The courts are also taking unnecessarily long in disposing of these

cases.

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