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STATE

Illegal mining in eco-sensitive Western Ghats

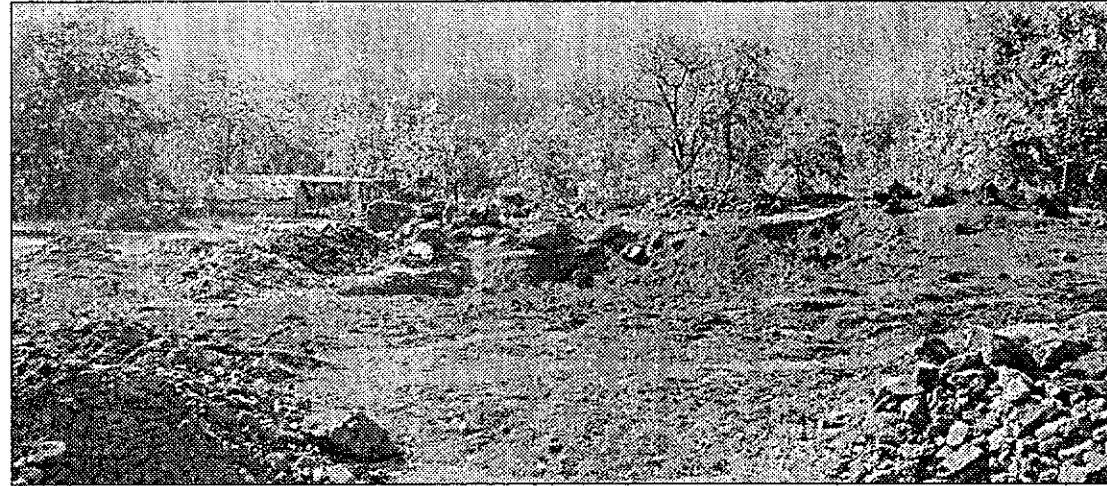
By AMIT S UPADHYE

Bangalore, Dec 20: Illegal iron ore mining has been going on uninterrupted for the last three months at three places in the eco-sensitive Western Ghats in Khanapur taluk of Belgaum district.

Survey No 1 to 8, 27 and 24 of Nerse village is thickly wooded non-reserve forest 'inam lands' granted to the Schedule Castes for cultivation.

The heavy sound of blasts in the night woke up the villagers and when they investigated they found the thickly wooded forest area had been cleared for mining.

Apparently, no mining lease has been granted by the Department of Mines and Geology, and there is no question of grant of mining leases, as the area has been declared 'eco-sensitive' by the Department of Forest Ecology and Environment. The State Forest Department will notify the area as Bhimgad Wildlife



Mining is going on at Nerse village in Khanapur taluk. —Express photo

Sanctuary and Sahayadri Biosphere Reserve.

The area which receives heavy rainfall, forms the catchment for the Mahdayi river, on which a dam has been proposed.

Interestingly, the Deputy Commissioner Shalini Rajanish has given NOC to the projects though she herself heads the Dis-

trict Task force to curb illegal mining.

HoD of Zoology Department of GSS College, Prof S Y Prabhu said that the local forest department is deliberately not taking action even though these Inam lands fall under the dictionary meaning of forest and are identified by the Expert Committee con-

stituted by the State Government as per the direction of Supreme Court of India in December 12, 1996

S Nagraj, Regional Environment Officer, said that the consent of Pollution Control Board was not obtained for mining "The department will book a case against mine owners," he said

Is Government making a U-turn?

■ Forest Department on November 27, 2003, took a decision not to permit exploration of minor and major minerals in the Western Ghats, to save the pristine ecosystem and biodiversity of the region

Director, Mines and Geology, was party to this and had agreed to the same.

■ The Department had also passed an order 'in the view of the sensitive ecology of the Western Ghats. Therefore, State Government is not in favour of allowing mining in the region. All the old mining leases in the region that have expired have not been renewed and no new mining lease has been granted.'