

PRESS NOTE 12.5.2011

GOA FOUNDATION CONDEMNS ASSAULT ON NILESH GAONKAR BY MINING COMPANY

The Goa Foundation today condemned the assault against anti-mining activist Nilesh Gaonkar of Caurem by goons hired by Shaikh Salim mine and said it signalled the desperation of the mine owner who could not operate the mine due to persistent resistance from the village adjoining the lease.

The Foundation said the mine has been shut down for several months due to large scale violations of mining plans, for which notice was issued by the Indian Bureau of Mines. The mining lease does not have consent either under the Air or Water Act to operate. Despite this, mining activity was started till it was brought to a halt by public agitation.

The Shaikh Salim mining lease was also issued show cause notices under the Irrigation Act for carrying out large scale changes to the nallahs and water courses on the lease.

The mine does not have forest clearance and is perched on a hill-slope. Allowing mining activity in such an area is a sure-fire recipe for disaster.

The mining company has carried out major dumping on the lease blocking the nullahs which cross the lease in total violation of the mining plan. They have now sought permission to relocate these dumps in exhausted quarry pits at Ambaulim. No permission has been taken for the proposed dumping from any authority of the State Government. The Goa Foundation has opposed dumping of any rejects outside the mining lease.

Chairman of the Western Ghats Ecology Experts Panel was shocked when he visited the site early this year and perused the EIA submitted by the mining lease owner which claimed there were no water sources on the site. However Gadgil found the lease area had good water resources which would certainly be destroyed with the resumption of mining in the area.

The assault on Nilesh Gaonkar has renewed the demand of the villagers and NGOs groups like the Goa Foundation for full and final closure not just of the Shaikh Salim mine at Caurem, but of other mining leases in the area which were given by the Portuguese when there were no environment laws on the books. The existence of these mines threatens permanently the environmental well-being of the people of the State. These mines must close. The Foundation will support the people of Caurem and ensure the Shaikh Salim lease is never opened again.

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