

Coal India has created more green cover than it has destroyed

PRATIM RANJAN BOSE



Has planted 2.5 hectares of forest for every hectare lost to mining: CIL arm

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An arm of State-owned Coal India Ltd (CIL) claims that the organisation's afforestation efforts have more than made up for the deforestation caused by its mining activities.

For the sceptical, a recent satellite survey by the Hyderabad-based National Remote Sensing Centre, an arm of the Indian Space Research Organisation, offers proof.

"For every hectare of forest damaged or destroyed by mining activity, we have recreated 2.5 times of forest," said AK Debnath, Chairman and Managing Director of the Central Mine Planning and Design Institute Ltd (CMPDI).

CMPDI is a consultancy arm of Coal India (CIL) and offers a wide array of services to the Central government, as well as to all State and privately owned companies with exposure in the mining sector.

Interestingly, even the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) refused to buy CIL's claim on forest creation.

"They refused to accept our claim and the remote sensing agency was asked to assess the ground situation.

"In a report submitted two months ago, the remote sensing authorities validated our claim," Debnath told *BusinessLine*.

Stress on reclamation

Debnath agreed there may be issues in the quality of the forests created in the past — through State agencies — especially with regard to reclamation of microorganisms.

“Earlier we used to plant only trees. It takes 20 years for creation of the ecosystem under normal course,” he said.

The miner is now focussing on three-tier biological reclamation in the progressive mine closure plan for open-cast projects. It means as the mine progresses, the mined part is reclaimed. As per the changed guidelines, CIL is now first creating grasslands, followed by creating shrubs and planting trees.

After a successful pilot in Jharkhand, the new techniques are now being made mandatory for all projects.

“We cannot bring the earth to its original shape due to the swelling factor. We remove more earth to extract every tonne of coal.

“Naturally, while reclaiming the land, there will be changes in shape. But we can help create a quality forest, if not a better forest than it was,” said Debnath.

According to him, in many cases, the forest land was highly deforested or thinly forested before CIL took it over.

Recharging groundwater

Debnath feels popular discourse on environment often bypasses Coal India’s contribution in recharging groundwater tables.

“When we close a mine we intentionally leave a void at the last cut. It is done to store rain water. We adopted this practice decades ago as surface water is not acidic in India,” he said.

This serves two purposes — it reduces the dependence on ground water; it recharges groundwater tables.

“Seventy per cent of the water requirement of CIL and the surrounding habitations are met through this mine water,” he observed, adding that no disturbance in the groundwater table is ever noticed beyond 300-400 metres from the edge of the mine.

Source:

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/companies/coal-india-has-created-more-green-cover-than-it-has-destroyed/article7866910.ec>