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Coal Mine Plans Spark Huge Protest From India's Tribal People



Hundreds of tribal villagers from India's Hasdeo Forest begin a rally and march tomorrow in protest at the government's plans for a massive expansion of coal mining on their lands.

People from Adivasi (Indigenous) communities who live in the forest – which, at 170,000 hectares, is one of the largest intact areas of forest in the country – will rally on Gandhi's birthday (October 2), then march 300km to the capital of Chhattisgarh state from October 4-13.

The Hasdeo Forest is the ancestral home of approximately 10,000 Adivasis belonging to the Gond, Oraon, Lohar, Kunwar and other peoples. It is also one of India's richest and most biodiverse regions.

Indian Prime Minister Modi's government is aggressively promoting a plan to open new coal mines in the area. The forest and its peoples would be destroyed if the mines go ahead.

Across India Modi intends to open 55 new coal mines and expand 193 existing ones, to increase coal production to 1 billion tonnes a year. Coalfields are being auctioned off to some of India's biggest mining corporations, including Adani, Vedanta and Aditya Birla.

Much of the existing government plan is illegal, as mining in Adivasi land should not proceed without their consent. Across India Adivasis are deeply

opposed to the mines, having seen first-hand how existing mines have destroyed forests and the communities that lived in them.

Adivasi people across India have been resisting mining for decades, including by blocking bulldozers and peacefully protesting. Many have been arrested, beaten and even murdered in response.

In a public declaration from the “Resistance Committee to Save Hasdeo Forest” (Hasdeo Aranya Bachao Sangharsh Samiti) the Adivasis said: “The federal and the state government, instead of protecting the rights of us tribal and other traditional forest dwellers have joined hands with mining companies and have been working towards devastating our forest and land.

“We are bound to resist and [march] to safeguard our water, forest, land and our livelihoods and culture that are dependent on them. We appeal to all citizens who love the Constitution and Democracy, all who are committed to safeguard the waters, forests, land and environment and all sentient citizens to join us in this gathering and the march.”

Survival International Director Caroline Pearce said today: “The extent of the coal mining now planned will not only destroy Indigenous homes, lands and livelihoods on an unimaginable scale, it also makes a mockery of Modi’s claim to be at the forefront of addressing the climate crisis. Supporting the Adivasi resistance to coal mining should be a global priority.”